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# 83 *new left review*

## UNDERSTANDING POST-COMMUNISM

Jürgen

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Christian Stallabrass

Eric Foner

Robert Kiersey

Chris Bertram

The Rectifying Revolution

Republics of Gilead

Women and Perestroika

Myths of the Primitive

Blacks and the US Constitution

Shepherds of Capitalism

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In this issue Jürgen Habermas reminds us of the passage in the *Communist Manifesto* where Marx and Engels predict that the bourgeoisie's critical weapon in demolishing the resistance of pre-capitalist social orders will be its economic superiority: 'The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization in their midst.' Habermas's purpose is to draw attention to the way in which the implacable and insidious drives of capitalist accumulation have undermined supposedly post-capitalist, as well as pre-capitalist, social formations. In reviewing six types of explanation for the East European revolutions of 1989—Stalinist, Leninist, reform-communist, postmodern, anti-communist and liberal—Habermas finally prefers to accept at least an element of a historical materialist explanation, that suggested by the passage from the *Manifesto*, before proceeding to argue that the key task for socialists today is precisely to explore that new complex of institutions that would be capable of replacing the dangerous and uncontrolled dynamic of capitalism. Habermas insists that the rejection of capitalism does not mean the rejection of any type of market. It does mean that the market economy must be prevented from dictating whole patterns of life or from destroying the environment.

Militarism has been the shepherd of capitalism throughout the twentieth century, as Victor Kiernan shows in a lively historical survey of the political forms with which capitalism has been twinned, which we publish here. In some cases the military helped to keep down a restless proletariat, in others it furnished a model for industrial enterprise. And, of course, military supplies sustained the armaments industry. Kiernan suggests that a pure capitalism would be desperately vulnerable, since bourgeois politics has invariably required the added appeal of imperialism, or fascism, or religion, or social demagoguery of some sort or other.

While Marx may have underestimated the force of nationalism or religion, it is still quite possible that capitalism's ideologies of consumerism will prove to be the stronger. In this issue of the Review the

Yugoslav philosopher Slavoj Žižek seeks to understand the types of nationalism that flourish in some of the post-Communist states. In a spirited interpretation, Žižek suggests that the oppressive varieties of nationalism typically reveal a phobia related to a feared 'theft of enjoyment'. While the Western public could vicariously relish the revolutions of 1989, seeing in them vindication and rejuvenation, the citizens of the post-Communist states remain at a tantalizing distance from consumerist cosmopolitanism, and instead too often console themselves with identitarian intoxication and intolerance.

Maxine Molyneux's major survey of the situation of women in the Communist and post-Communist states suggests that so far women have gained a little, in terms mainly of greater freedom to organize and discuss, but stand to lose much to the patriarchal and familial conceptions of recharged national and religious ideologies. While Molyneux's well-documented and wide-ranging study is attentive to variations in the position of women in the different states, the tangible threat of 'Republics of Gilead' emerges from her account no less than from Žižek's critique of chauvinist bad faith.

Julian Stallabrass's exploration of the notion of the primitive in British art reveals an essentialist concept of culture at work in the stereotypes employed by early British anthropologists and modernists when they claimed to be paying homage to the supposedly natural artefacts of primitive peoples.

While Stallabrass illuminates racism in aesthetics, Eric Foner, author of an outstanding recent work on Reconstruction, gives a compelling account of the patterns of racial exclusion which have marked the principles and workings of the US Constitution from the Convention of 1787 to the most recent times.

It has sometimes been claimed that the Marxist theory of history suffers from circular reasoning when it points to the functions performed by institutions in reproducing a given set of social relations. Chris Bertram's essay in historical materialism advances an argument to the effect that a species of selection can be seen at work in history, eliminating or marginalizing institutions, or even whole forms of society, which fail to stand the test of economic or military viability. Indeed the time may even come when competitive selection is a more tenable hypothesis in the social than in the natural sciences.

## What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left

There has recently been a spate of articles about the end of the socialist illusion, about the failure of an idea, and even about West European or German intellectuals finally coming to terms with the past.\* In them, rhetorical questions always prepare the way for the refrain that utopian thought and philosophies of history necessarily end in subjugation. The critique of the philosophy of history is, however, old hat. Löwith's *Meaning in History* was translated into German in 1953.<sup>1</sup> So what are the terms of today's debate? How should one assess the historical significance of the revolutionary changes in Eastern and Central Europe? What are the consequences of the bankruptcy of state socialism for political movements whose roots lie in the nineteenth century, or for the theoretical traditions of the West European Left?

The revolutionary changes in the Soviet bloc have taken many different forms. In the land of the Bolshevik Revolution itself, a reform process is underway that was introduced from the top, from the upper echelons of the Communist Party. Its results, and, more importantly, other unintended consequences, condense to form a process of revolutionary *development*, to the degree that changes occur not just at the level of general social and political orientation, but in essential elements of the power structure itself (of particular importance are changes in the mode of legitimation as a result of the birth of a political public sphere, the beginnings of political pluralism and the gradual renunciation of the Party's monopoly on state power). This process is now scarcely controllable, and, moreover, is greatly endangered by the national and economic conflicts it has thrown up. Everyone involved recognizes how much depends on the outcome of this fateful process. It created the preconditions for the changes in eastern Central Europe (including the Baltic states' declarations of independence) and in East Germany.

In Poland, the revolutionary changes were the result of the sustained resistance of Solidarity supported by the Catholic Church, in Hungary that of a power struggle within the political elite; in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, the regime was overthrown by peaceful mass demonstrations, in Romania by a bloody revolution; in Bulgaria, the changes occurred only sluggishly. Despite the variety of its guises, the nature of the revolution in these countries can be deciphered from what has happened: this revolution produces its own data. It presents itself as a revolution that is to some degree flowing backwards, one that clears the ground in order to catch up with developments previously missed out on. By contrast, the changes in the home of the Bolshevik Revolution retain an opacity for which concepts have yet to be found. The revolution in the Soviet Union has, up until now, lacked the unambiguous character of a recantation. A symbolic return to February 1917, or even to Tsarist St Petersburg, would be pointless.

In Poland and Hungary, in Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria—in other words, in those countries which did not achieve the social and political structures of state socialism through an independent revolution, but rather ended up with them as a result of the war and the arrival of the Red Army—the abolition of the people's republic has occurred under the sign of a return to old, national symbols, and, where this was possible, has understood itself to be the continuation of the political traditions and party organizations of the interwar years. Here—as revolutionary changes gather force and become revolutionary events—is also where one finds the clearest articulation of the desire to connect up constitutionally with the inheritance of the

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\* Originally published as 'Nachholende Revolution und linker Revisionsbedarf: Was heisst Sozialismus heute?', in *Die Nachholende Revolution: Kleine Politische Schriften* VII, Frankfurt am Main 1990, pp. 179–204.

<sup>1</sup> On the relations between ethics, utopian thought and its critique, see Karl-Otto Apel's clear contribution to W. Voßkamp, ed., *Utopieforschung*, Frankfurt am Main 1985, vol. 1, pp. 325–55.

bourgeois revolutions, and socially and politically with the styles of commerce and life associated with developed capitalism, particularly that of the European Community. In the case of East Germany, 'annexation' (*Anschluss*) is literally the word, since West Germany offers to fulfil both desires at the same time, in the form of an affluent Western society with a democratic constitution. The voters here have definitely not ratified what the opposition had in mind when it overthrew the Stasi-oligarchy with the slogan 'We are the people'; but the vote they cast will have profound historical effects as it interprets this overthrow—as a rectifying revolution. They want to make up for all the things that have divided the Western half of Germany from the Eastern for forty years—its politically happier, and economically more successful, development.

This rectifying revolution, in so far as it is meant to make possible a return to constitutional democracy and a connection with developed capitalism, is guided by models that orthodox interpretations consider the revolution of 1917 to have made redundant. This perhaps explains a peculiar characteristic of this revolution, namely its total lack of ideas that are either innovative or orientated towards the future. Joachim Fest has made a similar observation: 'These events gained their hidden, confusing centre . . . from the fact that they did not emphasize the element of social revolution that has governed pretty well all the revolutions in modern history.'<sup>2</sup> This is particularly confusing because it seems to remind us of a vocabulary supposedly superseded by the French Revolution: the reformist picture of the return of political regimes following one after another in a continuous cycle like that of the heavens.<sup>3</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that the revolutionary changes have been given a variety of mutually exclusive interpretations. I want, in what follows, to set out the six interpretative models that are to be found in discussions. The first three endorse, the other three criticize, the idea of socialism. The two groups can be arranged symmetrically in the following order: Stalinist, Leninist and reform-communist interpretations on the one hand; postmodern, anti-communist and liberal interpretations on the other.

### Corrective Interpretations

*Stalinist apologists* for the status quo are these days few and far between. They deny that the changes are revolutionary, seeing them instead as counter-revolutionary. They force a Marxist explanation that has lost its power on to the anomalous processes of reversal and repair. In Central Europe and East Germany, it had become increasingly evident that, in the words of a well-known formulation, those below were no longer willing, and those above were no longer able, to go on in the old way. It was mass anger (and not just that of a handful of imported provocateurs) that was directed at the apparatuses of state security, just as it had once been directed at the Bastille. The destruction of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 December 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. K. Griewank, *Der neuzeitliche Revolutionsbegriff*, Frankfurt am Main 1973.

Party's monopoly on state power could similarly be seen to resemble the execution of Louis XVI. The facts are so irrefutable that even the most die-hard *Leninists* cannot ignore them. Thus the conservative historian Jürgen Kuschynski makes the concession of using the term 'conservative revolution' in order to give the changes the status of a self-purifying reform within a longer-term revolutionary process.<sup>4</sup> This interpretation is, of course, still based on an orthodox history of class struggle whose telos seems to be predetermined. A philosophy of history of this kind is dubious from a purely methodological point of view; but, even setting that aside, it is incapable of explaining the type of social movements and conflicts that rise in, or—as with nationalist and fundamentalist reaction—are provoked by, the structural conditions of the governmental and social systems of state socialism. Moreover, political developments in Central Europe and East Germany have, in the meantime, gone way beyond anything that the idea of state socialism's self-correction might adequately describe.

These developments also form the main argument against the third position so strikingly personified by Dubček's return from internal exile to Wenceslas Square. In East Germany, too, a large proportion of the opposition that started and—to begin with at least—led the revolutionary movement, was guided by the ideal of a democratic socialism—the so-called 'Middle Way' between a capitalism curbed by the welfare state, and state socialism. While Leninists believe they ought to correct the mistaken developments that occurred under Stalinism, *reform communists* want to go back even further. In tune with many of the theoretical currents of Western Marxism, they start from the premiss that the Leninist understanding of the Bolshevik Revolution falsified socialism from the start by promoting the nationalization—as opposed to the democratic socialization—of the means of production, and thereby paving the way for increasingly autonomous, totalitarian and bureaucratic power structures. There are other versions of the Middle Way depending on which interpretation of the October Revolution one subscribes to. According to the optimistic reading, shared, among others, by the leaders of the Prague Spring, it should be possible to democratize state socialism radically in order to develop a new social order that is actually *superior* to Western mass, welfare-state democracies. According to another version, the best a Middle Way between the two 'actually existing' systems could achieve would be a radical, democratic reform of state socialism, which, as decentralized control mechanisms produced an increasingly differentiated economy, might at least come to represent an equivalent to the welfare-state compromise that was reached in developed capitalist societies after the Second World War. This search for an equivalent would culminate in a non-totalitarian state, in other words, one modelled on constitutional democracies; but one that, as far as the advantages (relative social security and qualitative growth) and disadvantages (in areas such as the development of the productive forces and innovation) of the system are concerned, would not aim to imitate but rather to *complement* Western forms of society. Even this weaker interpretation relies on the possibility of what has recently been

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<sup>4</sup> *Die Zeit*, 29 December 1989.

dubbed a functioning 'socialist market'. Some people argue that such a development is impossible on a priori grounds; others think one should find out by a process of trial and error. Even as militant a liberal as Marion Gräfin Dönhoff<sup>5</sup> believes 'that the existing dream of uniting socialism with a market economy could, with a little imagination and a little pragmatism, quite plausibly come true—they correct one another.'<sup>6</sup> This is a perspective that allows for a fallibilist type of communist reform that, contrary to Leninist interpretations, no longer makes any claims to be able to predict the course of history.

We can now forget speculation about state socialism's potential for reform and democratic development were it to be revolutionized from within. I suspect that the drastic effects of the legacy of Stalinism (and the growing threat of the Union's disintegration into its constitutive nations) render such speculation unrealistic in the case of the Soviet Union as well. The question of whether or not East Germany could have gone the Middle Way will also have to remain unanswered, if the premisses of my interpretation are correct; for the only way to have found out would have been to undertake a 'pragmatic and imaginative' experiment legitimated by popular consent. The majority of the population has in the meantime, however, decided unmistakably against any such experiment. After forty years of disaster, one can well understand why. The decision deserves respect, particularly from those who would never have been affected by any negative repercussions the experiment might have had. Let us, therefore, turn now to the three interpretative models that are critical of socialism.

### Critical Interpretations

The most extreme position on this side has not been very convincingly articulated. For a *postmodern critique of reason*, the basically non-violent upheavals represent a revolution to end the epoch of revolutions; a counterpart to the French Revolution, which does not hesitate to tear the terror born of reason out by its roots. The uneasy dreams of reason, which have produced demons for the last two hundred years, are over. But it is not reason that awakes—reason is itself the nightmare that vanishes as we wake. Here, too, the facts do not quite fit this model of history that takes its idealist inspiration from Nietzsche and Heidegger. According to this account, the modern age is overshadowed by a self-empowering subjectivity. Yet the recent rectifying revolutions took their methods and standards entirely from the familiar repertoire of the modern age. The presence of large masses gathering in squares and mobilizing on the streets managed, astoundingly, to disempower a regime that was armed to the teeth. It was, in other words, precisely the sort of spontaneous mass action that once provided so many revolutionary theorists with a model, but which had recently been presumed to be dead. Of course, this all took place for the first time in the unorthodox space of an international arena of participating and partial observers, created by the uninterrupted presence of the electronic media. It was, moreover, from the rational

<sup>5</sup> Editor of *Die Zeit*.

<sup>6</sup> *Die Zeit*, 29 December 1989.

legitimacy of appeals to the sovereignty of the people and human rights that the revolutionary demands drew their strength. The acceleration of history thus discredited the image of a posthistorical standstill; it also destroyed the picture, painted by postmodernism, of a universal bureaucracy of crystalline rigidity that had torn itself loose of all forms of legitimation. The revolutionary collapse of bureaucratic socialism seems instead to indicate that modernity is extending its borders—the spirit of the West is catching up with the East not simply as a technological civilization, but also as a democratic tradition.

From an *anti-communist* point of view, the revolutionary changes in the East signify a final victory in the global civil war started by the Bolsheviks in 1917: one more revolution turning against its own origin. The phrase 'global civil war' translates the term 'international class struggle' out of the language of social theory and into that of a Hobbesian theory of power. Carl Schmitt supplied this theoretical metaphor with a historical and philosophical background. In this account, the philosophy of history that came to power with the French Revolution and shared the utopian charge of its universalist ethics, became the driving force behind a civil war that was first contrived by intellectual elites and then projected on to an international stage. This hypothesis was expanded into a full-blown theory of global civil war at the time when the East–West conflict was just breaking out.<sup>7</sup> Conceived with the aim of exposing Leninism, it remains dependent on it, as a mirror image depends upon the original it inverts. Historical material, however, resists the ideological clutches even of a historian as learned as Ernst Nolte, who recently put forward the thesis that the global civil war has come to an end.<sup>8</sup> For the parties fighting the global civil war are so stylized that it becomes necessary to treat the policies personified by such heterogeneous figures as Mussolini and Hitler, Churchill and Roosevelt, or Kennedy and Reagan, as if they were all made of the same anti-communist clay. The metaphor of the global civil war takes an interpretation that arose during one specific, hot phase of the Cold War and fixes it as a structural description that is then polemicized and made to fit an entire era.

This leaves the *liberal* interpretation, which initially limits itself to the observation that the end of state socialism marks the beginning of the final disappearance of totalitarian government from Europe. An era, which started with fascism, is drawing to a close. Liberal ideas of social organization have prevailed in the form of constitutional democracy, the market economy and social pluralism. The overhasty prediction of the 'end of ideology' seems finally to have come true.<sup>9</sup> One does not have to subscribe to a monolithic theory of totalitarianism, thereby ignoring important differences between authoritarian, fascist, national-socialist, Stalinist and post-Stalinist regimes, in order to be able to recognize their similarities in the mirror of Western mass democracies. The disintegration of this syndrome in European socialist bureaucracies, as well as in Spain and Portugal, and the

<sup>7</sup> H. Kesting, *Geschichtsphilosophie und Weltbürgerkrieg*, Heidelberg 1959.

<sup>8</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 February 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Bell and Ralf Dahrendorf in *Die Zeit*, 29 December 1989.



accompanying development of a market economy independent of the political system, suggest the idea of a surge in the modernization process reaching out towards Central and Eastern Europe. The liberal interpretation is not wrong. It just does not see the beam in its own eye.

### Marx on the Logic of 'Civilization'

There are triumphalist variations on this interpretation, which could have been taken straight out of the first part of the *Communist Manifesto*, where Marx and Engels hymn the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, that is, to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image . . . And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrowmindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.<sup>20</sup>

It would be hard to arrive at a better characterization of the mood indicated by the replies that capitalists, eager for investment-opportunities, gave to the last questionnaire circulated by the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce. Only the phrase 'what it calls', qualifying the term 'civilization', betrays reservations. In Marx, this is not, of course, the German preference for a culture (*Kultur*) supposedly superior to civilization (*Zivilisation*), but a more fundamental doubt as to whether a civilization can afford to surrender itself *entirely* to the maelstrom of the driving force of just one of its subsystems—namely the pull of a dynamic, or, as we would say today, recursively closed, economic system which can only function and remain stable by taking all relevant information, translating it into, and processing it in, the language of economic value. Marx believed that any civilization that subjects itself to the imperatives of the accumulation of capital, bears the seeds of its own destruction, because it thereby blinds itself to anything, however important, that cannot be expressed as a price.

Today, the agent of the expansion that Marx put so squarely on the map, is of course no longer the bourgeoisie of 1848; no longer a class that rules within national limits but rather an anonymous, internationally operating economic system that has ostensibly severed any ties it might once have had with an indentifiable class structure. Similarly, the societies of today that have reached the 'economic summit' of this system bear little resemblance to the Manchester whose misery Engels once so tellingly described. For these societies

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<sup>20</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Communist Manifesto', in D. Fernbach, ed., *The Revolutions of 1848*, Harmondsworth and London 1973, p. 71.

have in the meantime found an answer to the stark words of the *Communist Manifesto* and the tenacious struggles of the European workers' movement: the welfare-state compromise. However, the ironic circumstance that Marx should still offer us the quotation that most aptly describes the situation in which capital scrambles into markets corroded by state socialism, in search of investment opportunities, is just as thought-provoking as the fact that Marx's doubts have themselves been incorporated into the structures of the most advanced capitalist societies.

Does this mean that 'Marxism as critique'<sup>21</sup> is as exhausted as 'actually existing socialism'? From an anti-communist perspective that makes no distinction between theory and practice, the socialist tradition has brought nothing but trouble. From a liberal perspective, everything that was of any use in socialism has already been put into practice during the era of social democracy. Does the annihilation of East European state socialism also dry up the sources from which the West European Left has drawn both its theoretical inspiration and its guiding values? The disillusioned Biermann, whose utopian flair has turned into melancholy, suggests a dialectical answer: 'Give us the spades. Let us finally bury that giant little corpse. Even Christ needed three days underground before he could pull off the trick: pity about the resurrection!'<sup>22</sup> Let's try and find a less dialectical one.

## II

The non-communist Left in West Germany has no reason to don sackcloth and ashes, but equally it cannot pretend that nothing has happened. It does not need to let guilt by association be foisted on it for the bankruptcy of a state socialism that it has always criticized. But it must ask itself how long an idea can hold out against reality.

Those responsible for the coyly pleonastic phrase 'actually existing' socialism seem, in using it, to have retained an obstinate sense of *Realpolitik*: they preferred the bird in the hand. Is it then sufficient simply to point out that the dove on the roof belongs to a different species—and will descend to us one day anyway? Even ideals, the other side replies, require empirical corroboration or they lose their power to orientate action. The idealist can only lose this dialogue, as it starts out from false premisses. It assumes that socialism is an idea, abstractly confronting reality, which stands convicted of the impotence of the moral 'ought' (not to mention the total contempt for humanity evident in any attempt at its realization). Of course, there is connected to this concept the normative intuition of a peaceful coexistence that does not provide for self-realization and autonomy only at the expense of solidarity and justice, but rather along with them. However, the socialist tradition ought not to explain this intuition by the direct

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<sup>21</sup> This is the title of an essay in which I deal with Marxism systematically for the first time (1960). It is published in English in Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, London 1974.

<sup>22</sup> *Die Zeit*, 2 March 1990.

approach of a normative theory, in order to set it up as an ideal opposing an opaque reality. It should instead be the basis of a perspective from which reality can be critically observed and analyzed. During the course of the analysis, this normative intuition should be both developed and corrected, and thus at least indirectly tested against the power of a theoretical description to disclose reality and convey empirical content.

### Errors and Defects

Western Marxism<sup>13</sup> has used this criterion since the twenties to subject itself to an unflinching critique that has left little of the theory's original form remaining. While practice was declaring its verdict, reality (in all its twentieth-century monstrosity) was bringing its arguments to bear at the level of theory, too. I would like to go over a few of the ways in which it has become apparent how much Marx and his immediate successors, for all their critique of early socialism, remained rooted in the original context and limited scale of early industrialism.

(a) The analysis confined itself to phenomena that can be disclosed from within the horizon of a society based upon labour. The choice of this particular paradigm gives priority to a narrow concept of practice that attributes an unambiguously emancipatory role solely to industrial labour and the development of the technology of productive forces. The forms of organization that arise as the work force is concentrated into factories are meant to supply the infrastructure for the development of an association of producers, for the raising of consciousness, and for undertaking revolutionary action. A productivist starting point of this sort, however, precludes consideration both of the ambivalences of the increasing domination of nature, and of the potential for social integration within and beyond the sphere of social labour.

(b) The analysis was, furthermore, dependent on a holistic conception of society: class division and, in the modern period, the objectifying violence of capitalist economic processes, tear apart and mutilate what was originally an ethical totality. The utopian potential of a society based on labour, spelled out in terms of Hegel's basic concepts, inspires the background assumptions that underlie a critique of political economy undertaken in a scientific spirit. It allows the process of the accumulation of capital to appear as an illusion that, if only it were dispelled, would dissolve into its underlying objective form, and become subject to rational control. Theory in this way blinds itself to the resistance inherent in the system of a differentiated market economy, whose regulative devices cannot be replaced by administrative planning without potentially jeopardizing the level of differentiation achieved in a modern society.

(c) The analysis also remained caught up in an over-concrete conception of conflict and social agencies, in so far as it based its calculations on social classes or historical macro-subjects supposedly responsible for the processes of production and reproduction in society. Complex

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Jay gives an overview of it in his *Marxism and Totality*, Berkeley 1984.

societies in which there are no straightforward connections between the social, subcultural and regional surface structures on the one hand, and the abstract deep structures of a differentiated economic system (intertwined with complementary state intervention) on the other, slip through this net. This same error has produced a theory of the state that no number of supplementary hypotheses can salvage.

(d) The restricted and functionalist analysis of constitutional democracy has had far more serious practical consequences than the defects discussed so far. For Marx, this form of government was embodied by the Third Republic he dismissed so contemptuously as 'vulgar democracy'. Because he understood democratic republics as the final form of the state in bourgeois society—on whose ground the final, conclusive battle of the class struggle was to be fought—he retained a purely instrumental attitude to its institutions. *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* tells us in no uncertain terms that Marx understood a communist society to be the only possible realization of democracy. Here, as in his earlier critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state, freedom consists solely 'in converting the state from an organ superimposed on society into one thoroughly subordinate to it'. But he does not say any more about the way freedom would be institutionalized; he is unable to imagine institutional forms beyond the dictatorship of the proletariat that he predicted would be necessary during the 'period of transition'. The Saint-Simonian illusion of 'an administration of things' reduces the expectation of the need for a democratic forum for resolving conflicts, to such an extent that the spontaneous self-organization of the people, as described by Rousseau, appears to be sufficient.

(e) Finally, the analysis was caught in the Hegelian tramlines of a theoretical strategy that aims to combine the philosophical tradition's claim to infallible knowledge with new historical modes of thought. Historicizing the knowledge of an essence, however, only replaces the teleology of Being with that of History. The secretly normative presuppositions of theories of history are naturalized in the form of evolutionary concepts of progress. This has unfortunate consequences not only for the unexplained normative basis of the theory itself, but also in other areas. On the one hand, a theory of this sort (regardless of its specific content) conceals the margin of contingency within which any theoretically guided practice is bound to move. By abolishing any sense of risk in those who will have to bear the consequences of action, it also encourages a questionable type of vanguardism. On the other hand, a totalizing knowledge of this sort feels in a position to make clinical evaluations of the degree of alienation, or success, of particular forms of life in their entirety. This explains the tendency to see socialism as a historically privileged form of concrete ethical practice, even though the *most* a theory can do is describe the conditions necessary for emancipated forms of life. What concrete shape these take is something for those eventually involved to decide amongst themselves.

(f) A consideration of these errors and defects, present in the theoretical tradition in varying degrees from Marx and Engels up to Kautsky, makes it easier to understand how Marxism, as it was codified by Stalin, could degenerate into the ideology that legitimated what was in practice simply inhuman—'vivisection on a large scale,

using live humans' (Biermann). Of course, the step to a *Soviet Marxism*, which Lenin introduced in both theory and practice, cannot be justified by reference to orthodox Marxist doctrine.<sup>14</sup> All the same, the weaknesses we have discussed in (a) to (e) above can be counted among the (of course neither necessary nor sufficient) conditions for an abuse, or even a total inversion, of what was originally intended.

### The Price of Social Democracy

Conversely, *social-democratic reformism*, which received important impulses from Austro-Marxists like Karl Renner and Otto Bauer, managed to disengage itself relatively early from a holistic conception of society and embarrassment at the autonomous dynamic of a market system; from a dogmatic view of class structure and the class struggle; from a false evaluation of the normative content of constitutional democracy; and from latent, evolutionist presuppositions. Of course, until very recently, the assumptions underlying day-to-day politics carried the stamp of the productivist paradigm of the society based on labour. After the Second World War, the reformist parties, having uncoupled themselves from theoretical concerns and turned pragmatic, achieved what is indisputably their main success, managing to establish a welfare-state compromise, whose effects reach deep into the structures of society. The radical Left has always underestimated how far-reaching this intervention was.

At the same time, however, the social democrats were taken by surprise by the systematic resistance inherent in the state power they had hoped to be able to use as a neutral instrument to universalize civil rights in the welfare state. It was not the welfare state that proved to be an illusion, but the expectation that one could use administrative means to arrive at an emancipated form of life. Moreover, the parties involved in the business of creating social satisfaction through state intervention found themselves increasingly caught up in an ever-expanding state apparatus. The absorption of political parties by the state is accompanied by the displacement of the democratic formation of political will into a largely self-programming political system—something the citizens of East Germany, liberated from the secret police and a one-party state, realized to their amazement as their first election campaign was taken over by Western campaign managers. Mass democracy, in its Western form, is stamped with the characteristics of a controlled process of legitimation.

Social democracy has, then, to pay a double price for its success. It does without radical democracy and learns to live with the normatively undesirable consequences of capitalist economic growth—as well as with the risks inherent in the labour market, which one can cushion, but not altogether eliminate, with welfare policies. This is the price that kept a *non-communist Left*, to the left of the social democrats, alive. This non-communist Left has many guises, and keeps alive the idea that socialism once meant more than state-welfare policies. However, the fact that self-managing socialism remains in its programme is

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<sup>14</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism*, Harmondsworth 1971

indicative of the difficulty it has in distancing itself from a holistic conception of society, and giving up the notion of a switch from a market-led to a democratically controlled production process. This was the best way of keeping the classical link between theory and practice intact, but also the best way of ensuring that theory became orthodox, and practice sectarian.

As with political practice, the increasing differentiation of institutions caught up with the theoretical tradition long ago. Marxism has become one other, more or less marginal, method of research among the many that make up academic life. This process of academicization has brought about long overdue revisions, and cross-fertilization with other theoretical approaches. The fertile combination of Marx and Max Weber shaped the field of sociological discourse as early as the Weimar period. Since then, the self-criticism of Western Marxism has been completed largely in universities, producing a pluralism mediated by academic discussion. Interesting and conflicting approaches like those of Pierre Bourdieu, Cornelius Castoriadis or Alain Touraine, of Jon Elster or Anthony Giddens, Claus Offe or Ulrich Preuss, indicate how dynamic an intellectual stimulus the tradition begun by Marx still is. As a tradition, its perspective benefits from being stereoscopic: it does not concentrate on purely superficial aspects of the process of modernization, and, equally, is not confined to the rear side of the mirror of instrumental reason, but is sensitive to the ambiguities in the processes of rationalization that plough through society. A plough simultaneously tears up the natural surface and loosens the ground beneath. Many have learnt from Marx, each in his or her own way, how Hegel's dialectic of enlightenment can be translated into a research programme. However, the reservations I enumerated in sections (a) to (e) form the sole basis on which impulses from the Marxist tradition can be taken up today.

### Socialism Today: A Purely Moral Standpoint?

If this sketch describes the position in which the non-communist Left found itself when Gorbachev ushered in the beginning of the end of state socialism, how have the dramatic events of last autumn changed the scene? Must people on the left now retreat to a purely moral standpoint, keeping socialism as nothing more than an idea? Ernst Nolte is willing to concede the Left 'an ideal socialism' that is 'a corrective or guiding limit case', and that is even 'indispensable', but he does of course go on to say: 'Anyone who wants actually to realize this limit case, runs the risk of relapsing or collapsing into the "real socialism" we have learnt to fear, however brave his rhetorical attacks on Stalinism may seem to be.'<sup>13</sup> To take this friendly advice would be to defuse socialism and reduce it to a regulative idea, of purely private relevance, that consigned morality to a place beyond political practice. It would be more consistent to stop manipulating the idea of socialism and give it up altogether. Must we then agree with Biermann when he says 'socialism is no longer a goal'?

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<sup>13</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 February 1990

Certainly, if it is understood in the romantic, speculative sense given it in the 'Paris Manuscripts', where the dissolution of private ownership of the means of production signifies 'the solution to the riddle of history'; or, to put it another way, if it means creating cooperative relations between people so that they cease to be *alienated* from the product of their labour, from their fellow human beings and from themselves. For romantic socialism, the dissolution of private property means the total emancipation of all human senses and qualities—the genuine resurrection of nature, the thoroughgoing naturalism of humanity, the end of the conflict between objectification and self-activity, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. But we did not have to wait for the most recent critiques of the false totalizations of the philosophy of reconciliation, or for Solzhenitsyn, to know better. The roots that bind romantic socialism to its original context of early industrialism have lain bare for a long time. The idea of a free association of producers has always been loaded with nostalgic images of the types of community—the family, the neighbourhood and the guild—to be found in the world of peasants and craftsmen that, with the violent onset of a competitive society, was just beginning to break down, and whose disappearance was experienced as a loss. The idea of the preservation of these eroded communities has been connected with 'socialism' ever since these earliest days; amid the work conditions and new forms of social interaction of early industrialism, the aim was to salvage and transform the forces of social integration of the passing era. The socialism about whose normative content Marx refused to speak is Janus-faced, looking back to an idealized past as much as it looks forward to a future dominated by industrial labour.

### The Presupposition of Rationality

In this *concretist interpretation*, socialism is obviously no longer a goal, and, realistically speaking, never has been. Faced as we are with a higher level of social complexity, we must submit the normative implications attached to this nineteenth-century theoretical formulation to a process of radical abstraction. The communicative conditions necessary to the establishment of justified confidence in the institutions of rational self-organization of a society of free and equal citizens become central precisely when one adheres to the critique of naturalized and unlegitimated forms of power. To be sure, solidarity can only really be experienced in the context of the necessarily particular forms of social life we inherit or critically appropriate—and thus actively choose. However, in the framework of a society with a large-scale political integration, let alone within the horizons of an international communications network, mutually supportive coexistence, even conceived on its own terms, is only available in the form of an *abstract* idea; in other words, in the form of a legitimate, intersubjectively shared expectation. Everyone should be justified in expecting that the institutionalization of the process for the non-exclusive formation of public opinion and democratic political will can ratify their assumption that these processes of public communication are being conducted rationally and effectively. The presupposition of

*rationality* is based on the normative meaning of democratic processes, which ought to ensure that all socially relevant questions can be taken up and dealt with thoroughly and imaginatively until solutions have been found that, while respecting the integrity of every individual and every form of social life, are uniformly in everybody's interest. The presupposition of *efficacy* touches upon the fundamental materialist question of how a differentiated social system that lacks both summit and centre might still organize itself, once one can no longer imagine the 'self' of self-organization embodied in the form of macro-subjects such as the social classes of theories of class, or the people of popular sovereignty.

The point of conceiving mutually supportive relations abstractly is to separate the symmetries of mutual recognition, presupposed by communicative action, that make the autonomy and individualization of socialized subjects possible in the first place, from the concrete ethical practice of naturalized forms of behaviour, and generalize them into the reflexive forms of agreement and compromise whilst simultaneously safeguarding them through legal institutionalization. The 'self' of this self-organizing society then disappears into the subjectless forms of communication that regulate the flow of the discursive formation of public opinion and political will, such that one can continue to presuppose the rationality of their fallible results. By dissolving into intersubjectivity, popular sovereignty is made anonymous, and then allowed to retreat into the democratic process and the legitimate communicative presuppositions of its implementation.<sup>16</sup> It finds its placeless place in the interaction between a constitutionally established process for the formation of political will and culturally mobilized public spheres. Whether complex societies could ever be enclosed in a tissue of proceduralized popular sovereignty in this way, or whether it is not rather the case that the network of intersubjectively shared and communicatively structured lifeworlds is torn so definitively that the autonomous system of the economy, and, with it, the self-programming processes of state management, will never be brought back within the horizons of the lifeworld—not even by the most indirect types of regulation—is a question one cannot answer adequately at the level of theory, and must therefore reformulate practically and politically. This question was, moreover, fundamental to a historical materialism that did not understand its thesis about the relation between base and superstructure to be an ontological statement about social being, but rather the mark of a seal that must be broken if the forms of a humane interaction are to cease being bewitched by a sociality that has turned into violence.

### III

As far as an *understanding* of this intention is concerned, the revolutionary changes taking place before our eyes teach us an unambiguous lesson: complex societies are unable to reproduce themselves if they

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'Volkssouveränität als Verfahren', in Forum für Philosophie, ed., *Das Ideal von 1789*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, pp. 7–36



do not leave the logic of an economy that regulates itself through the market intact. Modern societies separate out an economic system regulated by the medium of money in the same way as an administrative system; the two systems are on the same level, and however their various functions complement one another, neither may be subordinated to the other.<sup>17</sup> Unless something totally unexpected happens in the Soviet Union, we will never discover whether the relations of production under state socialism could have adapted themselves to this condition by following the Middle Way of democratization. But even conversion to the conditions of the international capitalist market does not, of course, mean a return to those relations of production that socialist movements endeavoured to overcome. That would be to underestimate the transformation capitalist societies have undergone, particularly since the end of the Second World War.

### The Demobilization and Reconstruction of Industrial Society

A welfare-state compromise that has established itself in the very structures of society now forms the basis from which any politics here has to start. Claus Offe gave us an ironic commentary on the way this is expressed in the reigning consensus over social and political aims, when he wrote: 'As the image of actually existing socialism becomes more and more desperate, more and more mournful, we all become "communists" in so far as we are unable finally to get rid of our concern about public affairs and our horror at the possibility of catastrophic developments in global society.'<sup>18</sup> It is not as though the collapse of the Berlin Wall has solved a single one of the problems specific to our system. The indifference of a market economy to its external costs, which it off-loads on to the social and natural environment, is sowing the path of a crisis-prone economic growth with the familiar disparities and marginalizations on the inside; with economic backwardness, if not regression, and consequently with barbaric living conditions, cultural expropriation and catastrophic famines in the Third World; not to mention the worldwide risk caused by disrupting the balance of nature. The social and ecological curbing of the market economy is the international formula into which the social-democratic aims of the social curbing of capitalism was bound to be generalized. Even the dynamic interpretation of an ecological and social demobilization and reconstruction of industrial society has support beyond the limited circles of Greens and Social Democrats. This is the basic issue around which argument today revolves. Questions arise about the feasibility, the time scale, and the ways of realizing common, or at least rhetorically endorsed, goals. There is also consensus about a mode of political action that aims to influence the self-regulating mechanisms of the system, whose autonomy must not be disturbed by direct intervention, indirectly and from the outside. As a consequence, the argument about forms of ownership has lost its doctrinal significance.

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<sup>17</sup> This is not the 'pragmatic concession' some of my critics on the left believe it to be, but is rather a consequence of an approach to social theory that has overcome holistic conceptions.

<sup>18</sup> *Das Zeit*, 8 December 1989

But the displacement of the struggle from the level of social and political goals to that of how these goals should be made operational, and to that of choosing and executing the appropriate policies, does not stop its having all the characteristics of a fundamental difference of opinion. Just as before, there is an acute conflict between those who use the imperatives of the economic system to set up an embargo on all demands that aim beyond the status quo, and those who would want to hold on to the word 'socialism' until the congenital fault in capitalism—that of shifting the social costs of the system's equilibrium on to the private fate of unemployment—has been eliminated;<sup>19</sup> until women have achieved genuine equality; and the momentum behind the destruction of lifeworld and nature has been checked. From the point of view of this radical reformism, the economic system is not a holy of holies but a testing ground. Even the welfare state, with its ability to take account of the peculiar character of that commodity called labour-power, is the product of an attempt to find out *how much strain* the economic system can be made to take in directions that might benefit social needs, to which the logic of corporate investment decisions is indifferent.

Of course, the project of establishing a welfare state has, in the meantime, become reflexive; the increasingly legalistic and bureaucratic tendencies that arose as side-effects of this project have robbed the supposedly neutral medium of administrative power, through which society was to exert an influence on itself, of its innocence.<sup>20</sup> Now the interventionist state itself needs 'social curbing'. The same combination of power and intelligent self-restraint that marks the political strategies of careful limitation and indirect regulation of capitalist growth needs to be taken back behind the lines of administrative planning. The solution to this problem can lie only in changing the relation between autonomous public spheres, on the one hand, and the areas of activity governed by money and administrative power, on the other. The potential for reflection necessary for such an undertaking is to be found in the form of sovereignty, made fluid by being made communicative, that makes itself heard in the topics, arguments and proposed solutions of free-floating, public communication. It must, however, also adopt the fixed form of decisions made by democratically organized institutions, for the responsibility for decisions with practical consequences needs to be clearly allocated through specific institutions. The power produced through communicative action can exert an influence on the foundations of the evaluative and decision-making processes of public administration, without wanting to take them over altogether, so as to bring its normative demands to bear in the only language that the besieged stronghold understands: it cultivates the range of arguments that, though treated instrumentally by administrative power, cannot be ignored by it, in as much as administrative power is conceived along constitutional lines.

<sup>19</sup> For ideas of a basic security that was no longer wage-centred, see G. Vobrude, ed., *Strukturwandel der Sozialpolitik*, Frankfurt am Main 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'Die Kritik des Wohlfahrtsstaates', in *Die Neue Unübersichtlichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1985, pp. 141–66.

## Money, Power and Solidarity

Modern societies satisfy their need of regulative capacities from three sources: money, power and solidarity. A radical reformism is no longer characterized by the particular key demands it might make, but rather because it aims to focus on social processes and demand a redistribution of power: the socially integrating force of solidarity should be in a position to stake its claim against the other social forces, money and administrative power, through a wide range of democratic forums and institutions. This expectation is 'socialist' in as much as the valid structures of mutual recognition, that we know from relations in everyday life, can be transferred to the sphere of legally and administratively mediated social relations through the communicative preconditions of non-exclusive processes for the formation of public opinion and democratic political will. Those areas of the lifeworld that specialize in communicating inherited values and cultural knowledge, in integrating groups and socializing rising generations, have always depended on solidarity. Radical-democratic processes for the formation of public opinion and political will must draw their strength from the same source if they want to have a say in how borders are drawn, and exchange regulated, between the communicatively structured spheres of life on the one hand, and the state and economy on the other.

Of course, whether or not there is still any future in ideas for a radical democracy<sup>21</sup> will depend on how we perceive and define problems—on which way of viewing problems prevails politically. If the only problems that appear urgent in the public arenas of developed societies are those disturbances which threaten the stability of the economic and administrative systems, if this type of problem comes to dominate the descriptions of systems theories, the claims of the lifeworld, formulated in a normative language, will seem merely to be dependent variables. This struggle over the increasing *de-moralization of public conflicts* is in full swing. This no longer takes place under the sign of a technocratic conception of society and politics; where society has become so complex as to be a closed book, only opportunistic behaviour towards the system seems to offer a way of finding one's bearings. However, large-scale problems actually confronting the developed societies are scarcely such that they could be resolved without a mode of perception sensitive to normative demands, without a reintroduction of moral considerations into the issues under public discussion.

The classical conflict over the distribution of wealth in the society based upon labour was structured against the background of the interests of capital and labour such that both sides were in a position to threaten the other. Even the structurally disadvantaged side could resort, in the last instance, to a strike; in other words, to the organized withdrawal of labour and the concomitant interruption of the production process. Today this is no longer the case. The conflict over the

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<sup>21</sup> U. Rodel, G. Frankenberg, H. Dubiel, *Die demokratische Frage*, Frankfurt am Main 1989

distribution of wealth has been institutionalized by the welfare state in such a way that a broad majority of people in work confront a minority of marginal groupings thrown together to form a heterogeneous mass without the power to set up any similar sort of embargo. If they do not just give up, and resort self-destructively to illness, crime or blind revolt to deal with their burden, the marginalized and the underprivileged can, in the last resort, only make their interests known by means of a protest vote. Without the electoral support of a majority of citizens, asking themselves, and letting themselves be asked, if they really want to live in a divided society in which they have constantly to close their eyes to the homeless and the beggars, to the areas of town that have been reduced to ghettos, to provinces that have been neglected, problems of this nature do not even have enough driving force to be adopted as a topic of broad and effective public debate. A dynamic of self-correction cannot be set in motion without introducing morality into the debate, without universalizing interests from a normative point of view.

### Responding to Changing Cultural Priorities

This asymmetrical model returns not only in the conflicts that flare up over questions of asylum, and the status of minorities, in a multicultural society. The same lack of symmetry determines the relation of the developed industrial societies to the developing nations and to the environment. If the worst came to the worst, the underdeveloped continents could threaten the developed nations with massive immigration, the hazardous game of nuclear blackmail, or the destruction of global ecological equilibrium; nature's reprisals, on the other hand, can be heard only as the quiet ticking of timebombs. This model of powerlessness increases the likelihood of a situation in which a problem that only gradually increases in urgency can remain hidden, and the search for a solution be put off until it is too late. These problems can only be brought to a head by rethinking topics morally, by universalizing interests in a more or less discursive manner in the forums of liberal political cultures which have not been stripped of all their powers. As soon as we recognize that we are all still at risk, we will be willing, for instance, to pay the price of closing down the obsolete nuclear power station at Greifswald. It helps to perceive the way one's own interests are bound up with the interests of others. The moral or ethical point of view makes us quicker to perceive the more far-reaching, and simultaneously less insistent and more fragile, ties that bind the fate of one individual to that of every other—making even the most alien person a member of one's community.

The major problems of today are reminiscent of the problem of the distribution of wealth in another way; they demand exactly the same peculiar brand of politics—one that simultaneously restricts and nurtures. The present revolutions, as Hans Magnus Enzensberger has pointed out, seem to dramatize this sort of politics. First, the majority of the population underwent a latent change of attitude, then the solid ground of legitimation collapsed beneath the feet of state socialism; after the landslide, the system is left as a ruin to be dismantled or

reconstructed. As a result of the revolution's success, an introverted and supplicatory politics arises: a politics of demobilization and industrial reconstruction.

A similar transformation occurred in West Germany during the 1980s in the field from which this metaphor is taken. The deployment of medium-range missiles was felt to be such an arbitrary imposition that it became the last straw that persuaded the majority of the population what a senseless risk the self-destructive escalation of the arms race was. The summit in Reykjavik (though I do not want to suggest a straightforward connection between the two) then initiated the turn to a politics of disarmament. To be sure, the change in cultural priorities responsible for the loss of legitimacy did not only occur subcutaneously, as it did in the private niches of state socialism, but could also take place entirely in public, and eventually against the backdrop of the largest mass demonstrations West Germany has ever seen. This is a good example of the circular process by which a latent change of values caused by current events can be linked up with processes of public communication, changes in the constitutional parameters of the democratic formation of political will, and impulses towards new policies of demobilization and industrial reconstruction, which, in turn, feed back into the changing priorities.

The challenges of the twenty-first century will be of an order and magnitude that demand answers from Western societies which cannot be arrived at, nor put into practice, without a radical-democratic universalization of interests through institutions for the formation of public opinion and political will. The socialist Left still has a place and political role to play in this arena. It can generate the ferment that produces the continuing process of political communication that prevents the institutional framework of a constitutional democracy from becoming desiccated. The non-communist Left has no reason to be downhearted. It might well be the case that many East German intellectuals will have to adapt to a situation that the West European Left has been in for decades—that of transforming socialist ideas into the radically reformist self-criticism of a capitalist society, which, in the form of a constitutional democracy with universal suffrage and a welfare state, has developed not only weaknesses but also strengths. With the bankruptcy of state socialism, this is the eye of the needle through which everything must pass. *This* socialism will disappear only when it no longer has an object of criticism—perhaps at a point when the society in question has changed its identity so much that it allows the full significance of everything that cannot be expressed as a price to be perceived and taken seriously. The hope that humanity can emancipate itself from self-imposed tutelage and degrading living conditions has not lost its power, but it is filtered by a fallibilist consciousness, and an awareness of the historical lesson that one would already have achieved a considerable amount if the balance of a tolerable existence could be preserved for the fortunate few—and, most of all, if it could be established on the other, ravaged continents.

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## The 'Woman Question' in the Age of Perestroika

Soviet women! Participate actively in the renewal of Soviet society! Rear a strong, worthy successor generation!

No. 13 of CPSU May Day Slogans, 1990.

The collapse of 'really existing socialism',<sup>1</sup> and its eclipse as an economic and political alternative to liberal capitalism, has many implications for the populations of the affected countries, not all of them positive.\* For the half that is female, there will be both losses and gains. As the state retreats from its self-designated role as 'emancipator of women', to be replaced by market forces, civil society and new ideological configurations, vulnerable social groups—such as women—are threatened by the abandoning of old commitments, and by a deepening of existing social divisions and political tensions. At the same time, such groups are now able to form their own organizations and challenge the limited conceptions of citizenship that prevailed under the old state structures.

Although it is too early to predict the outcome of these epochal changes—in some Communist countries it is still possible to talk of 'reforms' under Party rule, while elsewhere it appears that a wholesale move to the free market is in train—the implications for women are momentous. Feminists might view these changes with a degree of ambivalence: on the one hand, welcoming fresh opportunities for debate as state control is relaxed and civil society emerges as a new political terrain; but on the other, fearing that the 'transition from socialism' will lead to a worsening of women's social and economic position, at least in the short to medium term.

Although at this stage any analysis must necessarily be provisional, it is nevertheless possible to discern some changes in the definition of women's social position within this new context. This article will examine the three most pertinent issues: how those Communist parties that remain in power, or remain competitors for power, have redefined their policies with respect to women; how the socio-economic and political situation of women is likely to be affected by the abandoning of part or all of the orthodox Communist policy package; and how far these new conditions favour the emergence of feminist and women's movements. Whilst the main focus of the discussion will be the Soviet Union and China, where the Communist Parties have remained in power, some of the problems and possibilities that can be identified there have also emerged in other parts of the bloc of countries which emulated the Soviet economic model, its social policies and political institutions—not only in Eastern Europe but also in the Communist states of the south. Whereas the USSR waited until after Gorbachev's advent to power in 1985 to introduce major economic and social changes, some of the Third World Communist parties had begun these well before—China after 1978, Vietnam after 1981, Mozambique after 1983. (In Eastern Europe, Poland and Hungary had begun to liberalize—and to rethink policy on women—in the 1970s.) But even where these changes did not always explicitly involve changes in state policy towards women, the new orientations did affect women through their impact on the labour force, population policy and the family. With the launching of perestroika in the USSR after 1985, the great majority of the Communist states became involved in one way or another in this process, and it became increasingly evident that formerly prevalent views on 'the woman question' were being revised, sometimes radically.

The implications for women of these various changes have been of

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\* This article is an excerpt from my forthcoming book *Mobilization Without Emancipation: Women, the Communist State and Its Demise*, Verso, London. Thanks to the many friends here and abroad for help in gathering materials and for comments on earlier versions of this article, especially to Barbara Einhorn, Alistair McAuley, Hilary Pilkington and Anastasya Posadakya.

<sup>1</sup> The qualified use of the term 'socialist' prefixed by 'existing' is now an anachronism. No entirely suitable adjective to describe these former states has yet emerged: 'Soviet-type', 'socialist', 'Communist', 'state-socialist' can all be objected to on various grounds. Where, for the sake of brevity, I refer to 'Communist' states or centrally planned economies (CPEs), this is simply a shorthand for those countries which are or were ruled by Communist parties, and claimed allegiance to Marxist doctrine, placing a substantial proportion of their economies under state control.



two general kinds. On the one hand, there have been changes in economic policy entailing a revision of earlier commitments in favour of new goals. There is, however, another dimension to reform, so far confined to Eastern Europe: namely, the loosening of state control and the emergence or expansion of civil society. It therefore becomes important to look not just at what state and party leaderships declare, but also at what emerges from civil society itself, as the power of these leaderships recedes or is challenged. Such an analysis has relevance to more than the phenomenon of perestroika: it poses much broader questions about the previous social role of Communist states, and the nature of socialist transformation itself.

### Women and the Communist State: Before Perestroika

The starting point in any discussion of the Communist states in relation to gender issues is to establish the significance and meaning of their commitment to women's emancipation. In the socialist tradition and in the practice of Communist parties, the process of women's emancipation was seen as part of the overall socialist revolutionary project, combining ideas of social justice and equality with those of modernity and development. In the classical texts of Engels, Lenin and Marx himself there was a recurrent commitment to the emancipation of women from the bonds of traditional society and the inhumanity of capitalism; and this theme subsequently informed the policies of the ruling Communist parties, committed as they were to social transformation. Emancipation in this context came to mean two things: the mobilization of women into the labour force; and the lifting of traditional social constraints and injustices, thereby enabling them to take part in the effort to develop their societies. A number of classic measures (embodied in the resolutions of the 1920 Congress of the Comintern) were adopted to secure women's 'emancipation', first in the Soviet Union, and later in those states that followed in its footsteps. The most important of these were: the encouragement of women to work outside the home; the introduction of legal equality between men and women; the liberalization of laws on the family and marriage; the promotion of equality of opportunity in education; and the prohibition of sexually exploitative images and writing, and of practices such as prostitution. The earliest declarations of women's rights recognized that women would perform two roles: a 'maternal' function and a role in production. The socialist state was to facilitate this dual function by supplying adequate child-care facilities and provisions for paid maternity leave.<sup>2</sup>

Despite their historical significance and positive aspects, these policies

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<sup>2</sup> For critiques and assessments of the Communist project with respect to women, see Barbara Wolf Jancar, *Women Under Communism*, Baltimore 1978; Gail Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, Los Angeles 1978; Sonia Kruks et al., eds., *Promissory Notes*, New York 1989; Hilda Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women?*, Boston 1984; and my 'Women's Emancipation in Socialist States: A Model for the Third World?' in *World Development*, no. 9/10, 1981. On China, see especially Kay Ann Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China*, Chicago 1983; and Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*, California 1983.

had major limitations. Communist Party officials came to assume—or found it convenient to do so—that the oppression of women consisted almost entirely in their exclusion from paid employment. This, however, ignored both the question of women's inferior position in a segregated, hierarchical workforce, and the stringent demands of their new combined duties. Bolshevik policy on the family, while initially taken with the idea of abolishing the traditional model, soon turned to reinforcing it—while placing it under greater strain—in a way that precluded both a critique of gender roles within the domestic sphere, and consideration of alternative forms of family and interpersonal relationships. From the earliest Bolshevik period, the policies of Communist states towards women and the family were kept subservient to broader economic goals, and changed in accordance with them. Within these authoritarian political systems founded upon centralism and the imposition of orthodoxy, no autonomous women's movement, and no feminist critique of socialist theory and policy, were allowed. Official women's organizations mobilized women in the service of the economic and political goals of the state, in accordance with a narrowly defined set of 'questions of everyday life'. They did not challenge state policy, or tackle the gender inequalities which survived the substantial social transformations.

The Communist record on 'women's emancipation' is one of some advances coupled with substantial failure—an apparent paradox best understood in the context of the development strategies pursued by these states, rather than as resulting from inadequacies in socialist theory itself. Command economies and authoritarian states of the Soviet variety have attempted to overcome economic backwardness by pursuing policies designed to increase industrial and agricultural output as rapidly as possible. The success of these policies was made dependent on the mass mobilization of the population into various sectors of the economy, changes which had far-reaching consequences both for women and the institution of the family. Women achieved formal legal equality and a limited emancipation from the 'old feudal order'; along with men, they gained access to education, employment, cheap food and heavily subsidized health and housing. Yet the cost of this model was high, and its accumulated failures and distortions fell, as we shall see, especially heavily on the female sex.

This policy orientation prevailed in Communist countries from the 1920s until the late 1980s, and despite the variations of culture, history and politics, the Communist parties exhibited a remarkable degree of consistency in this regard. They proclaimed their commitment to 'the emancipation of women' and were quick to declare that the woman question, like those of the nationalities and unemployment, had been 'solved'. Official discourses stressed Communism's achievements in the realms of legal equality and educational provision, but above all they were proud of their record on employment. High female employment rates were achieved relatively early on in the centrally planned economies. In 1950 in the USSR the female participation rate was over 60 per cent, compared with 32.6 per cent in the

USA.<sup>3</sup> In 1980, half the labour force of Eastern Europe consisted of women, compared with 32 per cent in Western Europe; and even as the capitalist states began to catch up, by mid decade only Sweden, Denmark and Finland had higher rates than East Germany (77.5 per cent) and the USSR (70 per cent). The less developed regions under Communist rule also showed significant increases over their capitalist counterparts. Figures for 1980 show that in the Muslim Central Asian republics of the USSR 40 per cent of the labour force was female; in Vietnam 45 per cent; and in North Korea 46 per cent. The average for the Middle East was 20 per cent; for Latin America 22 per cent; and for the Far East (the second highest average after the CPES), 35 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Although in some cases these gaps were narrowing, they nevertheless remained significant. It was also true that women had entered the professions in substantial numbers—in some cases crossing gender barriers that in the West prevailed to the disadvantage of women. Engineering was a case in point: in the mid eighties, one third of Soviet engineers were female, compared with only 6 per cent in the United States.

Yet despite these advances, it was evident to many outside observers, and to a growing number of people in the Communist states themselves, that women's participation in the economy had brought them neither equality nor emancipation, and that women remained a subordinate social group in both the public and private realms. The realization that women's lot was a harsh one became part of more general criticism of orthodox Communism, and contributed to the rejection of the Communist model by the reform movements.

### Pressures from Above and Below

From the 1970s onwards, for reasons unconnected with the emancipation of women as such, policy relating to women was seen to require reassessment. The most pressing issues were demographic, and centred on the birth rate: many states became alarmed at its decline, and took measures to make it easier for women to have more children. This was particularly so in Hungary, the GDR, the USSR, and to an extreme degree in Romania where abortion was outlawed and women were coerced into having a minimum of three children per family. In a few cases—notably China and Vietnam—the opposite consideration prevailed, and coercion and incentives were used to bring down the high birth rate. These demographic considerations were directly linked to the growing preoccupation with an economic performance that was sluggish in comparison with the capitalist states; and in the Soviet Union to the additional fear that the population of the RSFSR would be outnumbered by that of Central Asia. In Yugoslavia, ethnic

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<sup>3</sup> Labour force calculated as percentage of population ages 15–54. Data from the United Nations Publications *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, New York 1986, and *The Economic Role of Women in Development*, New York 1986, and *The Economic Role of Women in the EC Region: Developments 1974–85*, New York 1985. These figures are lower than those given by national sources, a disparity due to different methods of calculation.

<sup>4</sup> *ILO World Labour Report*, Geneva 1985.

Albanians were seen to present a similar threat to the Serbian authorities, and 'appropriate' measures were taken to reduce the birth rate in Kosovo.

But other fears, common to these states both in the north and in the south, arose from a perceived disintegration of social life, associated with what some sociologists identified as 'alienation' or 'anomie', and what others linked to the shortage of housing, leisure facilities and consumer goods. The rising rates of divorce, alcoholism and crime were seen as evidence that the state had failed in its duty to support the family. Given the harsh conditions of daily life in most households, it was hardly surprising that families suffered under the pressure; but significantly, the 'decay of family life' was attributed by sociologists and public opinion alike to the pressures on women, especially the 'absent' (that is, working) mother. In the USSR in the first half of the 1980s, theories elaborated by psychologists in the maternal deprivation vein contributed to a general rethinking of policies.<sup>5</sup> The proposal to place a renewed social responsibility on the family would ensure that in practice such responsibility devolved once again upon women. During the 1970s and 1980s throughout the Communist bloc, women's social position became an object of official scrutiny, and the ideological importance given to their role in production was now displaced in favour of their role in the home—a shift which represented a radical departure from the slogans, if not the reality, of the past.

A further link between the crisis of orthodox socialism and the position of women was formed by popular attitudes in these countries themselves. In many cases, the history of Communist Party policy with regard to women was one of a reforming state intervening in society to bring about changes in women's position, often against the wishes and views of a majority of the population.<sup>6</sup> If this was true in the initial revolutionary phase, it remained so throughout the following period. In many cases, the result was that the emphasis on 'the woman question' and on the emancipation and promotion of women, could too readily be associated with the dead hand of the same distant and bureaucratic centralizing state, to be resisted and rejected along with its other policies. Such rejection was particularly strong when nationalist or religious interests were at stake—for instance, hostility to abortion in Catholic Poland, or the illegal continuation of arranged marriages and of the *kalam*, or betrothal settlement, in Soviet Central Asia.

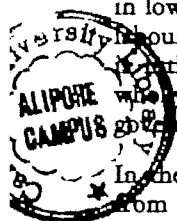
This resistance to 'emancipation from above' was compounded by conflicts resulting from the policies themselves. In the first place, the very encouragement of women to participate in economic activity generated its own forms of resistance: women were seen as being unfairly forced to take on additional burdens outside the home, and the formal equality such employment bestowed was vitiated by the

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<sup>5</sup> Author's interview with A. G. Karchev, then head of the Institute of Sociology, Moscow, and leading specialist on the family. For discussion, see my 'Family Reform in Socialist States: The Hidden Agenda', in *Feminist Review*, no. 21, Winter 1985.

<sup>6</sup> For a vivid account of the nature of Bolshevik intervention in Central Asia in the 1920s, see G. Massad, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Muslim Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia 1919–29*, Princeton 1974.

arduous and sometimes squalid conditions under which they worked at menial jobs in agriculture and industry. Despite a commitment to various forms of protective legislation, such as the exclusion of women from many hundreds of jobs 'to protect their maternal function', this covert paternalism was remarkable for its inconsistency. Women had always performed heavy labour in the countryside, where no laws 'protected' them—even from the hazards of chemical poisoning. In the towns, women performed such work as rubbish collection as a matter of course, and in factories frequently carried far heavier loads than permitted by law, and worked in insanitary, polluted and noisy conditions. In the USSR, for example, 98 per cent of janitors and street cleaners are women, as are 26 per cent of highway-construction crews. And, although women were formally banned from nightshifts, over 70 per cent of Soviet nightshift workers are female—a result of a loophole in the law that permits women to be employed for short-term emergencies only.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the gap between the average male and female wage stood at around 30 per cent in most northern Communist states (a gap larger in Vietnam and China), with women concentrated in low-paid jobs in 'feminized' occupations, their distribution in the labour force subject to marked horizontal and vertical segregation.<sup>8</sup> It is little wonder that few women in these circumstances could feel wholly positive about their participation in the labour force, or about government policies in general.



In the political realm, women were excluded even more markedly from positions of power and responsibility, despite a substantial measure of participation at lower levels. Most countries' Politburos contained no women, some had a token one, others a few 'candidate members'; and at ministerial level the few women were typically confined to posts in Health and Education. The policy of establishing quotas for women in political organizations, limited as it was, had its own negative consequences: since women were most frequently promoted in those bodies with little authority, such as legislatures, the very formal representation was contradicted by reality. In many cases, from Bulgaria and Romania to China and Cuba, the most prominent women occupied their posts less by virtue of individual merit than by family ties.<sup>9</sup> The official women's organizations, supposedly acting to further women's collective interests, were in most cases strict adherents of the Party line, and in some were moribund, corrupt entities, a fact which only added to women's disenchantment with political life.

### Mounting Dissatisfaction

Ultimately, it was the failure of the ruling Communist parties to deliver enough of the promised material progress, that provided the decisive impetus to reform. This was true for the whole range of social policies, but the emphasis on production to the detriment of

<sup>7</sup> Data from the USSR Central Statistical Administration, reported in *Industry*, translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXXIX, 1987.

<sup>8</sup> On the Soviet Union, see Alistair McAuley, *Women's Work and Wages in the USSR*, London 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Elena Ceausescu, Vilma Espin, Madame Mao illustrate this point.

consumption, and the elimination of the independent service sector, were failures with special implications for women. The continued scarcity and poor quality of labour-saving equipment for the home made a mockery of Lenin's assault on the drudgery of housework. The shortages of consumer goods, and the many hours spent queueing, more than offset any availability of socialized domestic services. The low standards and variable provision of nurseries; the lack of proper contraception and the consequent high abortion rates of many countries; the appalling conditions in maternity hospitals; the prevalence—especially in the Soviet Union—of male alcoholism as a response to the drabness of social life: all these factors created special problems for women. Official claims made for the superiority of the socialist order rang increasingly hollow among populations who had made their sacrifices and were now impatient for results.

It is useful to distinguish between the actual development and intensification of these problems and the growing intolerance of them by their long-suffering peoples. Taken as a whole, the economic situation of these countries has been, from the late 1960s, one in which growth has slowed down to the point of stagnation. But in the sphere of political life the crisis consisted in a growing awareness on the part of both leadership and population of the failings of the system, even though compared to earlier periods the situation was easing. This growing dissatisfaction had several causes: an extension of the real economic malaise into other areas of life; a greater impatience with the shortcomings of the system as a result of higher levels of education and the relative relaxation of political controls; a decline in the opportunities for social mobility as economic growth slowed down; and, evident in all matters to do with everyday life and social affairs, an increasing sense that the socialist countries were now lagging behind the West. All these factors had their impact on popular attitudes toward gender issues: the slowing down of the economy and the stagnation of output and productivity levels rendered the idea of emancipation through employment less and less plausible; at the same time, and as demand grew, the failures of social services, provisioning, transport and so forth, became more evident. The higher levels of education amongst women made some of them less willing to accept the subordinate position they experienced in the home and at work. The sheer difficulty of making ends meet, in terms of both time and money, placed households under acute strain. These material pressures were duly reflected in the rising number of divorces and—in the countries of the north—in the falling or static birth rate.

In addition, the greater visibility of the West produced demands for liberalization that had contradictory implications for women. Their forced participation in the economy was itself said to be an oppression not shared by women in capitalist countries, while the stark contrast with the West in terms of the provision of well-made clothes, domestic appliances, child and baby products, and essential items such as tampons and contraceptives, was felt to be increasingly unacceptable. Yet reinforcing this loss of confidence in the Communist record—which came, if not from feminism, then certainly from a general sympathy for women—was a quite different influence from

the capitalist world: namely the desire for greater openness in the area of personal life and in the public depiction of women, whether this took the form of egalitarian sexual freedom, prostitution or pornography. The latter became an important—at least an important male—source of interest in the West, producing a situation whereby the restrictions prevailing in Communist societies were seen as imposing a dictatorial puritanism that contrasted with the free sensuality of liberal capitalism.<sup>20</sup>

### The Emergence of a Feminist Opposition

A further component of the crisis of orthodox Communism in regard to women was that of explicit opposition to, and critique of, the Soviet model by indigenous women's groups. Feminism has always been a beleaguered force in countries ruled by Communist parties. The worldwide upsurge of feminism in the 1970s did not make much impact in the Communist states, where feminist writings and ideas were officially discouraged. The UN Decade for Women (1976–86) can be credited with making some small inroads by bringing Communist representatives into contact with feminists and feminisms from different parts of the world, and focusing attention on the position of women within the Communist states themselves. For all this, feminists remained isolated and ignorant of the debates going on in the movement outside, and many would-be feminists consequently absorbed the Party line that feminism was a trivial Western irrelevance, one especially unsuited to the different conditions of 'really existing socialism'.

Notwithstanding these unpropitious conditions, however, explicit opposition to Communist Party policy has at times been mounted by women's groups. Autonomous feminist forces had survived in some of the Communist countries prior to the imposition of 'democratic centralist' orthodoxy—notably in Russia (Kollontai, Armand, and others) and in China (Ting Ling). From Lenin onwards, feminism was routinely denounced as 'bourgeois', and seen as a challenge to the orthodox line that it was unnecessary because women had achieved their emancipation under socialism. Yet in the mid 1970s, as part of the global upsurge of women's movements, feminist currents began to

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<sup>20</sup> One of the first acts of the newly liberalized Polish and East German Communist youth magazines was the publication of photographs of naked women, as a sign of their new freedom from orthodoxy. Rupert Murdoch, quick to cash in on the current mood, has launched a new tabloid in Hungary called *Reform*, which, with its 'full-frontal female nudes', has already claimed a circulation of over 400,000 and is expected to produce annual profits of one million dollars. Such images are still outlawed in the Soviet press, but cooperatives are able to produce Pirelli-inspired calendars for sale to the general public. Meanwhile, *Komsomol*, the Communist youth organization, has presented 'beauty contests' which the Russian feminist Olga Voroninova has described as little more than 'porno shows' (*Tagesspiegel*, 24 November 1989). (In 1989, in a more domestic vein, *Komsomol* organized a 'Wife of the Year' competition.) With respect to pornography, in a context where sex and eroticism were hitherto identified as pornographic, and 'perpetrators' were severely dealt with, it is little wonder that notions of sexual freedom are crudely fashioned, and feminist criticisms dismissed as yet another form of authoritarian intrusion.

emerge in the Communist states.<sup>22</sup> In Yugoslavia a feminist group of teachers, journalists and writers began to campaign for changes in the laws which affected women, focusing on issues such as rape. In 1979 the Leningrad group of writers associated with Tatyana Mamonova published *The Almanac: Women and Russia*. Their club, 'Maria', produced a magazine that combined ideas of women's liberation with mysticism and Christianity. This enterprise provoked charges of anti-Soviet propaganda, and the group was dissolved, and four members, including Mamonova, were forced into exile over the following two years.<sup>23</sup> In 1982 in the GDR a women's peace movement associated with Christa Wolf opposed the extension, in times of national emergency, of conscription to women; but although their campaign had some success, the leaders were held for questioning, and at the end of 1983 two of them were imprisoned for six weeks before charges were dropped.<sup>24</sup>

During the same period, active feminist currents arose in some of the countries of the south. In Latin America a continent-wide movement developed, and neither of the two post-revolutionary states in the region were immune to its effects. Cuba's hostility to feminism—expressed in Vilma Espín's regular denunciation of its 'bourgeois' and 'imperialist' character—softened under the impact of changes taking place within socialist movements everywhere. As feminism began to appeal to socialists, so the Cuban leadership began to take note. Members of the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* began to attend feminist gatherings in Latin America, and so to enter into dialogue with individuals and organizations from different parts of the world.

Nicaraguan feminists had an important influence on Cuba at this time. In the very different political context of the Nicaraguan revolution there emerged in the 1980s a loyal feminist opposition, one that took an active part in debating and formulating state policy on questions concerning women. These feminists came from a variety of social backgrounds, and most of them were active in the FSLN, the women's organization (AMNLAE), or in other mass organizations. This movement was conspicuous in not confining itself to the Leninist agenda or the Party line on women. In a number of cases campaigns were fought to change Party policy, even over sensitive issues such as

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<sup>22</sup> A definition of feminism is in order here, but such attempts run the risk of being either too broad and inclusive, failing to distinguish between female militancy or solidarity and feminist objectives, or too narrow and based on assumptions that may be sectarian and/or ethnocentric. That there are different feminisms as well as different women's movements alerts us to the heterogeneity of women's interests, and to the varying ways in which they are socially constructed. But what most definitions of feminism agree upon is that as a social movement and body of ideas it challenges the structures and power relations that produce female subordination. Where I refer here to specific groups or individuals as 'feminist', this is because (a) they designate themselves as such; and (b) they conform to the above definition.

<sup>23</sup> For a full account, see Alix Holt, 'The First Soviet Feminists', in B. Holland, ed., *Soviet Sisterhood*, London 1986.

<sup>24</sup> Barbara Einhorn, 'Sisters Across the Curtain: Women Speak Out in East and West Europe', in *END Journal of European Nuclear Disarmament*, February 1984; and 'Socialist Emancipation: The Women's Movement in the GDR', in Krulik et al., *Provisionary Notes*.



abortion.<sup>14</sup> From the start, relations between Cuban and Nicaraguan women's organizations were less than harmonious, the differences in approach becoming evident in 1987 at the Fourth Latin American and Caribbean Feminist *Encuentro* in Mexico, at which around forty Nicaraguan feminists argued with three from Cuba. Nonetheless, some of this exposure to other feminisms that were not 'bourgeois' or 'imperialist' had an effect on Cuban attitudes in the 1980s. Feminist concerns began to be reflected in some of the research carried out by social scientists, sometimes conducted under the supervision of feminist scholars from the West. In the early 1980s the *Fronte Continental* was founded by the FMC, an initiative which aimed to bring Latin American feminism into line with Cuban priorities and—as one participant saw it—to stop it drifting off into less important issues like sexual politics.<sup>15</sup> Limited though these initiatives were, they nonetheless marked a significant and positive advance on earlier views. But, in contrast to the Eastern European and Russian cases, there appeared no independent feminist groups, at least none which sought to enter the public realm.

It was such groups, along with writers and film-makers, who, prior to perestroika, began to challenge the orthodox line that the woman question had been 'solved', and in some cases sought to define a programme of reform that was aware of, but not uncritical about, the situation of women in the West.<sup>16</sup> Given the degree to which the West had won favour with popular opinion in the socialist countries, these feminist currents, unimpressed by both socialist and capitalist records, came to represent an important alternative point of reference.

### New and Old Soviet Thinking

The transformation of Communist states, epitomized in the Soviet policy of perestroika, has led to the liberalization of both economy and political system, together with reduced confrontation with the West and a loosening of ties between the Comecon states. Initially conceived as an attempt to revitalize socialism in order the better to compete, as a distinct social system, with the capitalist West, it soon became apparent that the prospects for such competition were remote, and that the Communist states were seeking more and more to integrate themselves with the West. Whether in time this would succeed, and whether, if it did, these societies would retain anything distinctive in their mode of political, economic and social organization, remained open questions; what was evident was that these changes involved the sometimes wholesale adoption of certain Western modes of operation, stimulated by reform from above, and in most cases matched by popular pressure from below. One of the hallmarks of the new phase was the abandonment of the old 'internationalist' model,

<sup>14</sup> For details, see my 'The Politics of Abortion in Nicaragua', *Feminist Review*, no. 29, Spring 1988; and 'Mobilization without Emancipation', *Feminist Studies*, vol. II, no. 2, 1985.

<sup>15</sup> The *Fronte Continental* was established in Cuba after the 1980 UN Decade for Women mid-decade conference in Nairobi.

<sup>16</sup> Films and novels by women contributed to the former in no small measure. For the USSR, see especially Natalya Baranskaya, *A Week Like any Other*, now translated and published by Seal Press, 1990.

whereby other socialist countries imitated the USSR; but paradoxically it was the changes in the USSR that nonetheless greatly influenced and accelerated what was occurring in other states, notably the collapse of Communist power in Eastern Europe. This comprehensive revision has implications for women in three main areas: state policy; political representation; and the economy.

The discussion after 1985 of policies relating to women took place against a background of more than a decade of concern in the USSR about a range of social problems relating to family life. The divorce rate was the second highest in the world after the USA; alcoholism, 'hooliganism' and crime were on the rise; the birth rate was falling, infant mortality was rising, and a high number of abortions (seven million per year) were being carried out.<sup>7</sup> The rubric of 'every-day life', used to summarize these problems, implicitly excluded the issues of gender relations and the sexual division of labour at work. When controls on the press were loosened, and the claim that social problems had been 'solved' was dropped, a greater recognition of the depth of these problems was apparent in press and Party statements.

This concern was reflected in the policies that Gorbachev began to introduce in 1985, and which he enunciated in his address to the Twenty-seventh Party Congress in February 1986. Here he restated the orthodox position: 'Socialism has emancipated women from economic and social oppression, securing for them the opportunity to work, obtain an education, and participate in public life on an equal footing with men. The socialist family is based on the full equality of men and women and their equal responsibility for the family.' Gorbachev then went on to itemize the social problems in the USSR, and to outline the changes designed to enable women to combine their 'maternal duties' with involvement in economic activity: 'in the twelfth five-year period we are planning to extend the practice of letting women work a shorter day or week, or to work at home. Mothers will have paid leave until their babies are eighteen months old. The number of paid days off granted to mothers to care for sick children will be increased. The lower-income families with children of up to twelve years of age will receive child allowances. We intend to satisfy fully the people's need for pre-school children's institutions within the next few years.'<sup>8</sup>

Gorbachev's treatment of this issue included, however, a new element: the revival of the women's councils within places of work or in residential areas to 'resolve a wide range of social problems arising in the life of our society'. These women's councils, or *zhensoveti*, mushroomed in the following years, so that by April 1988 there were reported to be 236,000 such councils in existence, involving 2.3 million women. This emphasis on the political involvement of women was developed later to include the promotion of women within political

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<sup>7</sup> See Hilary Pilkington, 'Abortion, Contraception and the Future of Mother Russia', mimeograph.

<sup>8</sup> *Soviet News*, 26 February 1986.

organizations as a whole. Indeed, Gorbachev's treatment of issues relating to women and the family developed, as did so much of his policy, with an increasing radicalization as glasnost revealed the scope of the problems of 'private life'. By the time of the special Party conference in June 1988, Gorbachev was placing particular stress on the importance of women's political activity as such, beyond the restricted realm of the *zhensoviets* and improvements in 'everyday life': 'Women are not duly represented in governing bodies. And the women's movement as a whole, which gained momentum after the October Revolution, has gradually come to a standstill or become formal (that is, bureaucratized).'<sup>19</sup>

Beyond the policies themselves lay the issue of whether perestroika would succeed, bringing the political liberalization necessary for an effective women's movement to emerge, and consolidating the social services, consumer goods and living conditions that would materially benefit women. This issue would, in the long run, be decisive for women; yet it was precisely here that the contradictory character of the Soviet reforms became clearest. In the political sphere, Gorbachev called for a revival of women's soviets and women's movements. Yet as Soviet writers were soon to point out, the work of the *zhensoviets* required a willingness on the part of Party and employment officials to listen to what they said.

### Declining State Power and the Rise of Unofficial Groups

The call for women to be promoted to positions of authority was also compromised by the decreasing power of the state—whatever Gorbachev called for was not necessarily going to occur. In the March 1989 elections to the Congress of Peoples Deputies the percentage of women elected fell by over half, from 34.5 per cent to 15.6 per cent. (This plummeting representation occurred throughout Eastern Europe. In Poland in January 1988 the number of women holding parliamentary seats fell from 20.2 per cent to 13.3; and after 1989 similar drops were registered in Romania [from one third of all seats to only 3.5 per cent]; in Czechoslovakia [from 29.5 per cent to 6 per cent]; in Hungary [from 20 per cent to 7 per cent].) In the local elections held this spring, the percentage of women elected to the RSFSR Congress fell from 35 per cent to just 5 per cent. This was due in large part to the cancelling of previous quota systems which had guaranteed the representation of certain social groups such as workers, peasants and women; under these, women had 33 per cent of the seats in the Supreme Soviet and 50 per cent in local soviets. However, Gorbachev showed that he could and would act in areas under leadership control, such as in the promotion of women to more senior posts. In September 1988, for the first time in twenty-eight years, a woman, Alexandra Biriukova, was appointed a candidate member of the CPSU Politburo, a post she held until the reshuffle of July 1990. But amidst widespread indifference, and hostility to what was seen as traditional authoritarian imposition of quotas from above, it was an open question how successful any state-led promotion of women's political presence

<sup>19</sup> *Soviet News*, 19 June 1988.

would be. One of the pre-election opinion polls revealed the strength of popular prejudice against women in politics: 'being a man' was the main quality favoured in a candidate.

Outside the formal realm of institutionalized politics, glasnost opened up a new context for political action by unofficial groups—a few within the socialist tradition, others liberal, nationalist and religious. The years after 1985 saw a political explosion in the USSR as previously repressed tendencies erupted into public life. No greater limitations were placed on the formation of women's organizations and the expression of their demands than on any other group. All groups still had to ask permission to exist; not all did. Yet it was striking how, amidst this plethora of forces, new and old, feminist groups and gender issues appeared to play such a small role. The religious and nationalist groups paid scant attention to them, beyond routine calls for the end to women's 'involuntary emancipation' and return to the 'home and hearth'.<sup>20</sup> The 'informal' political forces were little better: in the People's Front that emerged in 1989, women's issues were not given any prominence, and women speakers seemed few and far between in the liberalized political atmosphere. Only five out of 1,256 delegates spoke at the June 1988 Party conference, and only one of these raised issues pertaining to women. Ironically, it seemed that socialist state policy on women, which had not achieved their emancipation, succeeded instead in alienating the population from any serious commitment to a feminist programme.

The liberalization of the economy had even more contradictory implications for women. Official sources and newspapers were increasingly admitting that the supposed emancipation of women through participation in economic activity had not occurred. The findings of feminists and sociologists documenting the double burden of women's lives appeared in *Pravda*, *Izvestiya* and *Literaturnaya Gazeta*; and the theoretical journal of the CPSU, *Kommunist*, even published the first feminist analysis of women's oppression in the USSR.<sup>21</sup> The unhealthy conditions under which many women worked, the evasions of protective legislation, women's low pay and their absence in positions of responsibility were all given publicity.<sup>22</sup>

### The Social Cost of Economic Rationalization

The priorities of perestroika, involving at least rationalization without technological restructuring, and at most, severe stabilization measures, are expected to result in unemployment in the USSR for the first

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<sup>20</sup> 'Statement of the Bloc of Russian Public Patriotic Movements', in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XLII, no. 1, 7 February 1990.

<sup>21</sup> N. Zakharova, A. Posadskaya and N. Rimashchinskaya, 'How we are Resolving the Women's Question', *Kommunist*, no. 4, March 1989; translated in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XLII, no. 19, 1989, and discussed by Cynthia Cockburn in *Marxism Today*, July 1989. The authors have now founded a Gender Studies Centre in Moscow.

<sup>22</sup> According to Zakharova et al., almost 33 per cent of all women earn less than 100 roubles per month, while the corresponding figure for men is 2 per cent. Some 90 per cent of low-paid employees are women, while 7 per cent of women hold positions of authority, compared with 48 per cent of men.

time in sixty years. Leonid Abalkin, deputy prime minister, told Parliament last June that between sixteen to nineteen million redundancies were expected by the year 2000. Women's representatives have expressed concern about the effects on women's jobs. Maria Lebedeva, addressing the plenary session of the Soviet Women's Committee, remarked that 'the scholars make no mention of who these people will be. Let's fill in the blanks: at least fifteen million of these will be women.'<sup>23</sup> Other observers have expressed concern that the increased autonomy and cost-effectiveness required of enterprises has meant that managers have become concerned about the social costs of employing women with children, especially after the increased maternity allowances which enterprises were in part responsible for. Zoya Pukhova, while chair of the Women's Committee, argued that 'in trying to exercise their right to have a short working day or a short working week, to have a sliding schedule or additional time off, women involuntarily come into conflict with management and the labour collective of the shop or brigade.'<sup>24</sup>

However, the matter is far from clear cut. The jobs most likely to be affected are in the manufacturing sector, and the most vulnerable workers are the manual unskilled and semi-skilled, and auxiliary clerical staff. But while the first category certainly includes women, the axe could fall even more heavily on men's jobs. Moreover, women in their middle years in both unskilled and auxiliary jobs in industry, while vulnerable to redundancy, are expected to find other work more easily than men in the expanding and already feminized service sector.<sup>25</sup> Women may also find employment in some of the newer light industries being planned. Segregated employment patterns, for all their disadvantages, especially in terms of pay, often serve as protected areas resistant to competition from new labour reserves.

Some female unemployment will occur (as it has already in Hungary and Poland), but one certain outcome is an intensification of gender segregation in employment. Working women will find themselves assailed by contradictory messages. On the one hand, economists believe that women are still needed in the labour force, especially if perestroika results in the growth of new light industries and a more developed service sector; while on the other, women are being called upon to take greater responsibility in the home, and to have more children. More than one Soviet commentator has suggested that economic restructuring requiring the loss of labour makes it necessary for women to give up their jobs and return to the home to care for their families. A convenient link between increasing the population and raising productivity is thereby established. Predictably, the group of Russian patriots associated with *Pamyat* welcomes 'modernization' as a 'way to raise production standards and free woman from involuntary emancipation and return her to the family, where she fills

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<sup>23</sup> See the report by Maria Lebedeva from the plenary session of the Soviet Women's Committee, in *Izvestiya*, 23 October 1988, p. 6, excerpted in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XI, no. 43, 1988, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Pravda*, 2 July 1988.

<sup>25</sup> See Alistair McAuley, 'Perestroika: Implications for Employment', in Martin Macauley, ed., *Gorbachev and Perestroika*, London, forthcoming.

the role of mother, keeper of the hearth and bulwark of the nation.<sup>26</sup> However, this is not exclusively a neo-conservative and nationalist position: Gorbachev, too, has referred to the 'purely womanly mission', investing domesticity and motherhood with an aura of the sacred and natural. Articles in the press frequently appeal for the restoration of a more 'natural' state of affairs 'where men are men and women are women'. (This has long been a trope in social science literature, which in the seventies and eighties analysed the 'crisis of femininity' as resulting from 'women's emancipation'—that is, overwork.) Henceforth, efforts would be made to restore some balance in women's lives, which meant making it more possible than before for *women* to combine home and work responsibilities, and of course to have more children. A four-day working week for women, and shorter hours for mothers of young children, were seriously considered this year by the USSR Supreme Soviet. But part-time work—the compromise that has evolved in the West—has not been seen as feasible, because of the rigidities in the system. (There are only 700,000 registered part-time workers in the USSR, the majority of whom are female.) But one proposal being debated by Gorbachev's advisers in 1989 was the introduction of higher wages for men to enable them to support their dependent wives at home. This startling about-turn in Communist Party thinking was justified in humanitarian terms by one of Gorbachev's chief advisers as the only way that women would be relieved of the pressure of work and be able to stay with their young children.<sup>27</sup>

The reality for most women is that they will need to work, and that they will probably continue to have few children. Surveys reveal that women have taken advantage of the new maternity-leave provisions introduced selectively since 1981, but expressed little interest in giving up work altogether, even if men's wages were to rise significantly.<sup>28</sup> Unless the USSR is hit by a major recession, it is likely that there will be jobs for women to do and women ready to do them. These factors, together with Gorbachev's proposed reduction in hours, may keep most Soviet women in the workforce, but they will only increase the divisions between men and women workers, both materially and ideologically, as motherhood and household tasks increasingly distinguish men from women as workers with different social attributes and different responsibilities.

### The Effects of Economic Liberalization in China

The discussion has so far focused on the implications for Soviet

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<sup>26</sup> 'Statement of the Bloc of Russian Public Patriotic Movements'. This discourse is given particular meaning within nationalist movements, where the reintegration of women within the family is seen as part of the move against the oppressive Soviet legacy. This patriarchal chauvinism is clearly visible, for instance, in the Smallholder's Party of Hungary (slogan 'God, Fatherland and Family') which sees sovietization as responsible for 'denaturing women'.

<sup>27</sup> Author's conversation with Tatyana Zaslavskaya, author of *The Second Soviet Revolution*, London 1989.

<sup>28</sup> Polls conducted in the USSR have so far shown that less than 20 per cent of women would choose to give up work even if their family incomes remained constant. The picture is very different in Poland and Hungary, where women's responses are more varied, with around 45 per cent preferring to give up work. V. Bodrova and R. Anker, *Working Women in Socialist Countries: The Fertility Connection*, Geneva 1985.

women of perestroika. One of the hallmarks of perestroika was its claim that the Soviet Union no longer acted as the model for other socialist countries, which were now free to pursue different, national, paths of development. In the case of some countries, notably China, this had long been the position. In other countries formerly close to the Soviet model, for instance Cuba, there has been a great resistance to current Soviet policy. Whilst in the USSR perestroika involved a simultaneous liberalization of economic and political life, in some of the less developed countries a measure of economic liberalization proceeded without comparable political change. This was so in China where the democracy movement was brutally repressed, and in Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola and—until its acceptance of political pluralism in late 1989—South Yemen. Cuba, Albania and North Korea, apparently resisting both forms of liberalization, were the exceptions. While recognizing that no single model exists, it is possible to make some observations about the ways in which Communist parties translated the pressure to reform into policies affecting women, focusing on two areas: population policy and economic liberalization.

China and Vietnam are perhaps the clearest instances of how these two policy areas converged. Both states adopted population-control policies in the 1970s as a way of addressing the problem of slow economic growth, and pursued similar incentive packages to encourage a reduction in the birth rate. Both also introduced measures to relax state control over some sectors of the economy. More is known about the Chinese case, where the economic liberalization began earlier and where it converged in 1978 with the adoption of the one-child-family policy. This campaign, aimed at reducing the Chinese birth rate through a combination of incentives and punishments, was more effective in the urban than in the rural areas where production is household based and the availability of family labour is directly linked to economic success or failure.<sup>29</sup> Thus, paradoxically, the economic reforms, which enhanced the importance of the household as a unit of production, have given an unforeseen advantage to those with large families.<sup>30</sup> The tensions generated by the conflict between these state policies have devolved most directly upon the female sex. There has been a rise in female infanticide, and in the abandonment or divorce of women who give birth to daughters; and the toll on the mental and physical health of women who transgress the law is obvious. Many of these problems are exacerbated by the maintenance in China of customary marriage practices which reinforce the preference for sons over daughters. Sons are valued more because they retain responsibility for the natal family when they marry, and this means providing for

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<sup>29</sup> Repressive measures are especially prevalent in Tibet. As a national minority, Tibetans are allowed two children, but refugees report mounting pressure (through forced abortions and sterilizations) to have only one. Third children have no claims on welfare provision or employment.

<sup>30</sup> E. Croll, D. Davin and P. Kane, *China's One Child Family Policy*, London 1985; E. Croll, 'The State and the Single Child in China', in G. White, ed., *The Chinese Development State. Change and Continuity*, London, forthcoming; and Delia Davin, 'Gender and Population in the PRC', in Haleh Afshar, ed., *Women, State and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia*, London 1987.

their parents in their old age. Daughters marry and leave their family of origin and are expected to vest their interests in their husband's kin. The one-child policy, when added to these practices, greatly increases the premium on having a male child: many couples defy the law and suffer the consequences, the women bearing the brunt of social ostracism, late abortion and sometimes involuntary sterilization.

The economic reforms known as the 'four modernizations', which came into effect in 1978, have also affected women directly, with China going further than many other reforming states in liberalizing certain economic activities, and permitting practices previously banned, such as advertising and Western films. China's efforts to modernize and stimulate production have also involved a rationalization of enterprises to put them on a more profitable basis. As in the USSR and Eastern Europe, this has involved tightening up work practices and laying off labour. Evidence suggests that women's work is particularly vulnerable, and it is they who are often called upon to give up their jobs.<sup>31</sup> Discrimination against women at work is also on the increase, and with unemployment high, enterprise managers have no trouble filling vacancies with men. They tend to see women as a more expensive workforce, as a result of paid maternity leave, crèches and earlier retirement; but since it is usually the husband's employer who supplies the couple's accommodation, this should in theory equalize the costs.<sup>32</sup>

### Changing Patterns of Discrimination

Testimony to the changes is an increasingly self-confident discrimination against women in China. Amidst the growing criticisms of earlier policies—especially the extremes of the Cultural Revolution—prejudice against women occurs in the guise of being realistic about 'natural' differences between the sexes. The famous Iron Girls, once cast in the role of the heroines of work, capable of doing men's jobs as well as men, are now openly derided as 'fake men'. There is more talk, even by the Women's Federation, of recognizing sexual difference, and less of denying or minimizing it. Soon after the policy changes of 1978, women began to be transferred out of jobs such as train driving or construction work into lower-paid work as clerks, or into light-industry female ghettos. Others were simply dismissed. Women were openly talked of as being especially suitable for boring, repetitive jobs because they were good at rote learning and were conscientious. Delia Davin has listed the forms of open discrimination typical of the period of reform: 'Factories and other enterprises either demand higher examination scores from female secondary school graduates who apply for employment, or turn them down outright. Technical and vocational schools which take secondary school leavers discriminate against females except for recruitment to training courses in

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<sup>31</sup> Marilyn Young, 'Chicken Little in China: Women after the Cultural Revolution', in Kruks et al., *Premissary Notes*.

<sup>32</sup> See E. Croll, 'New Peasant Family Forms in Rural China', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, July 1987; Delia Davin, 'Women, Work and Property in the Chinese Peasant Household of the 1980s', in Diane Elson, ed., *Male Bias in the Development Process*, Manchester, forthcoming 1990.



traditional female skills such as nursing, office work and kindergarten teaching. Even university graduates suffer from this prejudice against employing women. Only just over a quarter of students in higher education are female, and China is desperately short of graduates, yet the officials in charge of job assignment report not only that many work units prefer male graduates, but that some reject all women or accept only a tiny number. There have been cases where men with poor marks have been preferred over women with excellent ones, and a notorious instance where members of a laser institute made every effort to recruit a student on the strength of a brilliant graduation thesis, only to change their minds when they discovered her sex. The problem of allocating female graduates is now so serious that some universities have considered reducing the number of female students they will accept.<sup>33</sup> Although discrimination was rife in the pre-1978 period, it has lately grown on the more fertile soil of the new economic and ideological configurations, and acquired a new boldness.

On the other hand, the relaxation after 1981 of controls over small-scale production has given women forms of income-generating activity some of which can be highly profitable, and which, because they are usually home-based, can be combined with child care and domestic responsibilities more easily than most forms of waged work. The Women's Federation of China, deploring the conditions most women face in industrial jobs, has even expressed the view that women should keep out of industry if they can, as it places them under too much pressure. It has called on women instead to make 'commodity production'—that is, 'sideline' activities—their favoured area of work. This kind of small enterprise is found equally in the urban and the rural areas. In the former, women more typically work with other members of the family running small businesses providing goods and services. Though women may benefit from sideline production and from the higher standard of living it could bring, there are longer-term dangers inherent in the deepening sexual division of labour that has attended women's re-integration into family-based production and abdication from the public realm of work. Moreover, as feminist scholars have pointed out, although the old work-point system contained its own inequalities, it had the merit of making women's contributions visible, and conferring status on the earner. In the new family-based production systems, the income generated is controlled by the male family head, and women's contribution is usually invisible.

The new property laws have negative consequences for women. Land has become available to households through the contract system, which is usually made out to male heads of household. As Delia Davin notes, 'a peasant woman's access to the means of income generation ... now depends on her relationship to a man. This contrasts sharply with the collective era when membership of the collective conferred

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<sup>33</sup> Delia Davin, 'Chinese Models of Development and Their Implications for Women', in Haleh Afshar, ed., *Women, Development and Survival in the Third World*, London, forthcoming.

use-rights to the means of production.<sup>34</sup> This re-inscription of women into the household has been compounded in the countryside by the feminization of agriculture, as men have left to take up more profitable work elsewhere. Although this has placed women in key roles as producers, and sometimes placed them at the head of the household, they are performing work that is unpopular, arduous and usually badly paid.

### New Signs of Cultural Oppression

In the industrial sector, economic liberalization in China has brought with it enterprise competition and Western investment; it has also introduced cultural phenomena previously banned. One example is advertising, which appeared in the 1980s for the first time in forty years. Before the massacre in Tiananmen Square, advertising expenditure was growing by more than 30 per cent a year, peaking at US\$227 million in 1986, 5-10 per cent of which was accounted for by the multinational corporations. The Women's Federation has protested at the uses being made of images of women models, and has called for government controls. But it is not just imported imagery that has brought about changes in the portrayal of women: by the mid eighties the familiar images of socialist iconography—the smiling woman worker at her machine—were being taken down from public hoardings and factory walls. In their place stood the proud housewife, the new consumer, pictured beside her washing machine.<sup>35</sup>

At the popular level, as in the northern cases discussed earlier, there has occurred a reaction to the old puritanism and what could be seen as the return of a repressed femininity, as young women attend to the details of hair, clothes and make-up, and grow anxious again about standards of female beauty and shape. In the literature of the past decade, women writers have been free to reflect on the pain of the hard years of work and self-denial, and have returned to the persistent theme of the lost pleasures of motherhood, of the guilt experienced in leaving the children in care, sometimes for months on end, to fulfil the demands of work. Again, some observers have detected an undertow of 'West is best', and the attendant danger that the disillusion with the past becomes a thirst for its antithesis.

In general, it is clear that those able to afford them can now benefit from the wider availability of domestic appliances and consumer goods. In the period before the student protests, greater tolerance of public debate and discussion permitted the expression of views critical of official and more conservative opinion. The Women's Federation, and on occasion independent women, have articulated feminist arguments defending women's place in society as the equals of men. But such feminist movements or networks that might have emerged as part of the democracy movement would find it difficult to mobilize in the atmosphere of fear characteristic of the post-Tiananmen period.

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<sup>34</sup> Delia Davin, 'The New Inheritance Law and the Peasant Household', in *The Journal of Communist Studies*, vol. 3, December 1987.

<sup>35</sup> E. Croll, *China After Mao*, London 1984.

## Old Problems, New Struggles

It is evident that perestroika, or economic liberalization, has produced, in a variety of countries, a major shift away from some of the central tenets of Communist Party belief and policy with respect to women. This is as true of official thinking as it is of publicly expressed popular attitudes. If the old policies, based on a combination of some principle and much instrumentalism, had the merit of promoting positive changes in the name of 'women's emancipation', their overall validity, and the legitimacy of their official language, are now in doubt. The 'woman question', a phrase as redolent of old thinking as 'internationalism', may well disappear, and gender issues—if raised at all—will henceforth be formulated in a very different political language.

The paradox of this change is, however, that the underlying problem will endure: the absence in most countries of a strong feminist input into policy—whether from above or below—means that the policies adopted with respect to women will continue to be determined by the overall priorities of the state, whether economic, demographic or social. Questions of social justice, visions of a society in which old privileges and authority patterns have been surpassed, are unlikely to form an integral part of the new direction of economic development, which for the foreseeable future is more likely to be premised on harsh policies of economic stabilization and adjustment.

As in the pre-reform period, the issue is not so much one of how great the commitment of the state is to women's emancipation, but rather of the very conception of gender relations upon which future policies will be based. The particular issue of gendered divisions in employment and in the home was never seriously tackled by government policies. Instead, in most countries, while the material effects of inequality (women's double burden) were deplored, the divisions themselves, far from being seen as socially constructed, were increasingly talked of as natural, even desirable, by planners and populace alike, as a reaction to the extremism of earlier years.

Traditional gender divisions were reinforced through the structural and ideological biases inherent in policy and in the organization of society. Scarcity and financial hardship deepened the division of labour and mutual dependency in the family. For many households living on the edge of economic viability, both men and women performed a 'double shift': men took a second job or worked in the informal economy, while women put their remaining energies after a day out at work into managing the household, bartering scarce goods and services, and caring for children and relatives. The family, despite all its tensions, evident in soaring divorce rates, was often regarded as a refuge or as a site of resistance against the authoritarian state and suffocating public life. Many women expressed longings to have motherhood and femininity restored to them. These factors taken together implied that reforms aimed at reinforcing women's ties to the family would find substantial resonance within the populations of these states, even if their effect was to intensify gender segregation and inequality.

Meanwhile, the threatened roll-back of women's reproductive rights, particularly with respect to abortion, gathers pace in a number of countries as a result of religious, demographic or neo-conservative pressures. In the USSR this issue has already attracted more attention in a period of 'openness' and speaking the truth. The high abortion rate and horrific conditions in clinics (something which Mamonova's group condemned, and were charged with making anti-Soviet propaganda for revealing) have been the subject of wide public discussion since 1985. The fact that the number of abortions exceeds live births is not so much discussed as a failing of the system's provision of birth-control devices, than as a moral failing of the society—and, to be more precise, another symptom of corrupted femininity. In other states, legislative changes have already been accepted. In Poland, for example, a bill to 'defend the unborn child' by criminalizing abortion was introduced last June. It proposes a three-year prison sentence for those infringing the law. An intense public debate is now under way with the outcome still uncertain. In Germany, unification under Christian Democracy threatens to impose restrictions on abortion in the East, to bring it more into line with the West where it is illegal unless a panel of doctors argues that it is necessary in order to avoid 'physical or social distress'. Efforts to impose restrictions on the East were successfully resisted earlier this year by feminist campaigners who mounted demonstrations in defence of the existing law. However, there is fear that the current agreement could be overturned in the future. At present in East Germany, abortion on demand is legal and free up to the twelfth week of pregnancy.<sup>36</sup>

In the field of political representation, similar limitations recur. The new commitment—evident at least in the USSR—to a greater political role for women and to the revival of a women's movement is again limited by the continuation of traditional assumptions within government circles. Although these are being challenged by more feminist perspectives, they still have considerable weight. Political liberalization has, however, opened up a space for autonomous women's movements and the raising of feminist issues, and it may be that in time these movements will gain strength and emerge as a significant feminist current in the post-Communist countries. That such movements should be free to publish and press their demands is a necessary precondition for any real challenge to prevailing gender inequalities in the social distribution of power and rewards in these societies. It is also essential that the movements play a part in debates over welfare provision and the negative effects of marketization, and in challenging the simplified view of 'Western' freedom, with its elisions and indulgences of sexism in its various guises.

### The Prospects for Soviet Feminism

It is early days yet, but Soviet women, some of them self-proclaimed feminists, have begun to make their voices heard in the period since

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<sup>36</sup> More than one third of pregnancies ended in abortion in East Germany last year; in the West, the International Planned Parenthood Federation estimates that approximately 15–20 per cent of pregnancies end in abortion each year—about 85,000 of which are legal and another 45,000 illegal or performed abroad; *International Herald Tribune*, 15 May 1990

1985. Professional women, among them social scientists, lawyers and journalists, have added their criticisms of the social order to the general clamour in their different countries. Women's groups and networks have expanded, with new organizations appearing and gathering strength. In the USSR by the end of the 1980s, women-focused groups and clubs were springing up, predominant among them literary and arts associations like 'Herald', a Moscow club for women writers; 'Women's Creative Effort', organized by Tatyana Ryabikina; and Olga Bessolova's 'Club of Women's Initiatives'—all serving to promote and encourage members' work. Women filmmakers and journalists have also established their own clubs, and a Council of Women Writers was set up under the auspices of the existing Writers' Union. The first Gender Studies Centre has recently been established in the Moscow Institute for Socio-Economic Problems of the Population. The objectives of these groups vary, as do their perspectives on women's issues; for example, the 'Transfiguration' (*Preobrazheniye*) Women's Club working in the Academy of Sciences aims to 'enhance women's role and initiative within the socio-cultural spheres'. In Leningrad the human-rights activist Olga Lipovskaya, publisher of the only samizdat magazine for women, *Zhenskoye Chteniye* (Women's Reading), has expressed the view that women's situation cannot be seriously improved without restructuring the entire social system. *Zhenskoye* contains poetry, essays, and even some articles by Western feminists.<sup>37</sup>

Despite a prevailing climate of hostility and ignorance of the women's movement, some women, like Olga Voronina, Anastasya Posadskaya, Valentina Konstantinova and Natalya Zakharova of the 'Lotos' group, have openly identified themselves as 'self-confessed' feminists, and have participated in several international forums bringing women from different countries together for debate. 'Lotos' stands for 'Liberation from social stereotypes', and its members share a commitment to undertaking theoretical work on gender inequalities. Among other things, they have given publicity to the issues of male violence against women, and the rising incidence of rape in some of the Soviet republics. In articles and public meetings, they have also discussed the taboo subject of sexuality, condemning the puritanism and ignorance that surrounds it. Collectively, they have rejected the dominant view of the family crisis, arguing that it results from the as yet incomplete transition from 'patriarchy to egalitarianism', and that Gorbachev's policies aim simply to shore up a system that does not work. Consequently, the group has taken a stand against current attempts to re-domesticate Russian women, and has called for the equal sharing between men and women of household responsibilities.<sup>38</sup> On 24 July this year, they helped to found the Independent Women's Democratic Initiative and to draft its declaration. Two members of 'Lotos' helped to write the *Kommunist* article (see footnote 21), and as a result were invited to submit a position paper to the Council of Deputies, which was later accepted. They now have a role in formulating policy as

<sup>37</sup> In *These Times*, 21–27 March 1990.

<sup>38</sup> From the paper presented to the fifth annual conference of the European Forum of Socialist Feminists held in Sweden in November 1989; and author's interview.

members of an executive body of the Supreme Soviet which concerns itself with 'the position of women, protection of maternity and childhood, and strengthening of the family'.

Nina Belyaeva, a feminist campaigner, has recently spoken in optimistic terms of feminism's prospects in the USSR, but noted that this was not a common view: 'The women's groups... I am told, still amount to a drop in the bucket [sic]—and are without clear goals or independence, all of them intellectual clubs.' She added that most women are too exhausted to have the energy for clubs and movements, and speculated that 'perhaps feminism is only for a well-fed society'.<sup>39</sup> If feminism had taken a precarious hold in the Communist states prior to the reforms, on account of state repression, it now addressed equally resistant forces within civil society. More than in any other formerly Communist country, feminism in the Soviet Union faces particularly entrenched opposition. It is derided and caricatured by men and women alike in a social context where anti-feminism draws on motherhood as a powerful cultural symbol to essentialize sexual difference. The writer Tatyana Tolstaya has attacked feminism's 'Western' rationality for misunderstanding Russian womanhood. She counterposes the idea that Russian women are the embodiment of real power in society, a power wielded within the family, 'at times extending to tyranny'. Soviet society, a product of its repressive history and sentimental culture, has, she claims, become almost matriarchal. Soviet women apparently do not need more power than they already have, they do not aspire to equality with men, they do not want to work or participate in politics, they are not oppressed by men (who are poor, weak and broken things, mere 'property' like 'furniture').<sup>40</sup> However problematic and, arguably, unsubstantiated such notions of female 'power' are, Russian feminists have to take account of such pervasive but confused sentiments in their campaigns, if they are to avoid political marginalization.

### Feminist Currents in Eastern Europe

Feminist currents—even movements—were active during the 1980s in other Eastern and Central European countries. In Hungary, feminists participated in the opposition movements, and sociologists played an important role by focusing attention on women's particular vulnerability to poverty and overwork. Although most of these currents were composed of educated professional women, there were also signs of working-class discontent and mobilization around concrete women's issues. For the first time, women's sections appeared in some trade unions, with the aim of defending and advancing women's working conditions.<sup>41</sup> Earlier this year a Hungarian Women's Association was

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<sup>39</sup> *In These Times*, 21–27 March 1990.

<sup>40</sup> Tolstaya identifies women as the true soul of the nation—the trope beloved of nationalists and conservatives. See her enthusiastic review of Francine du Plessix Gray, *Soviet Women Walking the Tightrope*, New York 1990, in *NYRB*, 31 May 1990. For a critical response to du Plessix Gray's portrait of Russian women, see the review by K. van den Heuvel in *The Nation*, 4 June 1990.

<sup>41</sup> This was also happening in the GDR in 1989. It is interesting to note that Soviet miners striking in Siberia demanded crèches and shorter working hours so that they could fulfil their family responsibilities.

formed, and after much debate decided to identify itself as feminist. In Yugoslavia, feminists now speak of the existence of a women's movement, its activists campaigning on issues such as violence against women, for reproductive and gay and lesbian rights, and for policy changes via family laws and party-political involvement.<sup>42</sup> And even in Catholic Poland, where feminism has had very little impact on Solidarity's policies, there were stirrings in 1989 when Polish women demonstrated in their thousands against the proposed bill to criminalize abortion. In October, some of those involved in the campaign for reproductive rights founded the Polish Feminist Association. A feminist newspaper, *Baba Polka*, appeared and campaigned to defend reproductive rights. At government level there were moves to set up a women's group to advise on policy matters.

In East Germany, where feminists initiated the independent peace movement and were sufficiently established to organize demonstrations and meetings, the issues they raised were debated within opposition organizations such as *Neues Forum*. Feminist discussion circles generated a number of political initiatives, including the Berlin-based association known as 'Sophie'. In 1989 a group of feminists from Leipzig left *Neues Forum* because the leadership opposed parity of representation for men and women. They joined the newly founded Independent Women's Association, whose manifesto demanded 'genuine equality and emancipation for women', and called for an end to divisions of labour at home and at work, and shorter working hours for both men and women. In a detailed exposition of its premises and demands, the Association outlined its social programme, which sought to retain the gains of the past but overcome the 'patriarchal power structures' that oppress and exclude women. Although supporting unification, the Association favoured 'a mutual process of reform' that respected 'the internal sovereignty of both states'. It argued for a society based on a market economy, but with some planning role for the state to guarantee democracy and progressive, ecologically responsible social policies. The Association called for a 'Ministry of Equity' to be established; for a comprehensive revaluation of women's work in the home and economy; and it favoured quotas for women and men in the areas of social life where one sex predominates. It pledged itself to resist the restrictions on abortion threatened by the process of reunification.<sup>43</sup> The Association achieved some political influence in the Modrow government, nominating a Minister without portfolio, and helped to draft the Social Charter and draw up plans for a women's ministry. In a joint campaign with the Green Party it received 2.7 per cent of the vote.<sup>44</sup>

In most northern states these manifestations of feminism were paralleled by a small but growing representation of feminist ideas and

<sup>42</sup> Lepa Mladjenovic, 'Summary on Women's Movement in Yugoslavia' [sic], presented to the workshop on women's movements, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, May 1990.

<sup>43</sup> Programme of the East German Independent Women's Association, translated by Barbara Einhorn and published in *East European Reporter*, vol. 4, no. 2, Summer 1990.

<sup>44</sup> Irene Dolling, 'Between Hope and Helplessness—Women in the GDR after "The Turning Point"', mimeograph.

concerns in the press, not only by journalists and writers but also in letters from readers. These may not represent the dominant views, but there clearly exists a range of popular opinion that echoes the concern already articulated by feminists on questions of work, discrimination and the 'double burden'.

The manner in which Eastern European and Soviet feminists formulate their political priorities are necessarily shaped by the particular circumstances and cultural conditions in their own regions, as well as by differences of theoretical approach. Yugoslavian feminists have linked women's issues to racial discrimination against the ethnic Albanians, and have opposed sterilization programmes in Kosovo. The same is true of Hungarian feminists in relation to the gypsy population. In East Germany, peace issues have always come to the fore, and the Women's Association has campaigned with other groups for disarmament and demilitarization, in addition to preparing itself for the abrupt, possibly drastic, changes in social provision resulting from unification this year. Although a broad consensus exists among feminist groups on the question of abortion and contraception on demand, the need to campaign for social equality, and on issues such as violence and sexuality, there are nonetheless significant differences of approach and analysis. In Russia, there exists a stronger current of support for ideas of sexual difference than is the case in Hungary, East Germany or Yugoslavia, with Russian feminists like Larisa Kuznetsova arguing that women and men have innately different psychologies, and that women's embody superior ethical values, reflected in their caring and nurturing roles.<sup>45</sup> As women become mobilized as political actors, it is inevitable that differences of politics and of perspective will increasingly be reflected both within and between women's movements.

### The Future: Emancipation or New Forms of Domination?

So far, five years of perestroika in the USSR have delivered little to women in material terms, and in a number of other countries they are considerably worse off than under the old regime. In Hungary and Poland, many more women than men have been laid off from work,

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<sup>45</sup> Larisa Kuznetsova quoted in *the Times*, 21-27 March 1990. See also du Pleaux Gray, and C. Hansson and K. Liden, *Moscow Women*, London 1980, for ample illustration of the strength of such views among Soviet women. Maternalist and essentializing movements have always posed particular difficulties for feminists, and yet they are among the most common forms of female collective action. In Latin America, for example, women, often in the poorer communities, have been involved in struggles for basic needs provision, citizenship rights, and for other goals such as peace and democracy. Movements of this kind are closely identified with particular social constructions of femininity and motherhood, and the women who participate in these actions often see their politics as a natural extension of their roles in the family, and as based on primordial, intrinsically feminine sentiments. The goals of these movements are usually formulated in altruistic terms rather than as ones designed to advance the particular interests of the actors. In most of these cases, women identify their interests with the household, the welfare of its members, and its conditions of existence in the community. However limited in practice, essentializing movements based on motherhood are not by definition incompatible with all forms of feminism—it depends on their goals, and whether, in defending or celebrating motherhood, they challenge the social devaluation and subordination associated with it.



and everywhere the burden of domestic provisioning has increased, as shortages imposed by rationing are replaced by those created by rising prices. Fears of further unemployment grow along with concern over cuts in public expenditure. Russian feminists have pointed out that the deterioration of social life and proliferating violence in the USSR also have gendered effects—as evidenced by the increase in wife battering and in the growing incidence of rape.

Yet were the reforms to succeed, the overall improvement in economic conditions would greatly reduce the everyday pressures to which women are subjected, and thereby in some measure realize the early Bolshevik hope that economic and scientific advance could lessen the burden of household chores on women, principally by altering the sexual division of labour. As long as men are paid higher wages than women, and as long as many men have to perform two jobs in order to gain an adequate income, then gender roles within the family will not be redefined. The preconditions for tackling the sexual division of labour are, on the one hand, a recognition of this goal by the state and organized civic groups, and on the other, greater employment flexibility in place of the current system which locks men into rigid employment patterns. Women should have the same earning power as men, with both sexes allowed more time for parenting and domestic responsibilities. As Zakharova et al. have said, 'emancipation is a two-way process: men must be given opportunities to participate more in housework and child raising... We think that men as well as women should be able to combine parenthood and career... direct and indirect discrimination against women in the workplace and men in the family should be eliminated.'<sup>46</sup> Their call for government measures and a review of existing legislation to help bring this about underlines the importance of women's claims on the institutions of government in a period when their influence and representation remains minimal.

The socialist programme of women's emancipation has always been subordinated to a particular economic model—a result of socialist theory and revolutionary state practice alike. Women's emancipation is certainly dependent upon the direction of economic policy: no programme of social change can be divorced from the general economic conditions in which it takes place. Yet in order to succeed, the policies of perestroika would have to be expanded to include a commitment to establishing real gender equality, coupled with a mobilization of civic support for such a programme. That commitment cannot be derived from, nor formulated to meet, the requirements of economic development alone. In the end, the issue in question is whether the changes being implemented within the centrally planned economies will eventually provide the opportunity to realize a greater degree of emancipation for women, or whether prevailing attitudes will remain unchanged, and women's inequality will be confirmed by the introduction of new forms of discrimination. Either outcome is possible, but the evidence to date provides few grounds for optimism.

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<sup>46</sup> N. Zakharova et al., 'The Womens Question and Perestroika'.

## *Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead*

Why is the West so fascinated by the recent events in Eastern Europe? The answer seems obvious: what fascinates the Western gaze is the *re-invention of democracy*.<sup>\*</sup> It is as if democracy, which in the West shows increasing signs of decay and crisis, lost in bureaucratic routine and publicity-style election campaigns, is being rediscovered in Eastern Europe in all its freshness and novelty. The function of this fascination is thus purely ideological: in Eastern Europe the West looks for its own lost origins, for the authentic experience of 'democratic invention'. In other words, Eastern Europe functions for the West as its Ego-Ideal: the point from which the West sees itself in a likeable, idealized form, as worthy of love. The real object of fascination for the West is thus the *gaze*, namely the supposedly naive gaze by means of which Eastern Europe stares back at the West, fascinated by its democracy. It is as if the Eastern gaze is still able to perceive in Western societies its *agalma*, the treasure that causes democratic enthusiasm and which the West has long lost the taste of.

The reality now emerging in Eastern Europe is, however, a disturbing distortion of this idyllic picture of the two mutually fascinated gazes. It is best illustrated by the strange destiny of a well-known Soviet joke about Rabinovitch, a Jew who wants to emigrate. The bureaucrat at the emigration office asks him why. Rabinovitch answers: 'There are two reasons why. The first is that I'm afraid that the Communists will lose power in the Soviet Union, and the new forces will blame us Jews for the Communist crimes . . . ' 'But,' interrupts the bureaucrat, 'this is pure nonsense, the power of the Communists will last forever!' 'Well,' responds Rabinovitch calmly, 'that's my second reason.' In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, published in 1989,<sup>1</sup> it was still possible to count on the efficacy of this joke; however, according to the latest information, the main reason cited by Jews emigrating from the Soviet Union is Rabinovitch's *first* reason. They fear, in effect, that, with the disintegration of Communism and the emergence of nationalistic forces openly advocating anti-Semitism, the blame will again be put on them. So today we can easily imagine the reversal of the joke, with Rabinovitch answering the bureaucrat's question thus: 'There are two reasons why. The first is that I know that Communism in Russia will last forever, nothing will really change here, and this prospect is unbearable for me . . . ' 'But,' interrupts the bureaucrat, 'this is pure nonsense, Communism is disintegrating all around!' 'That's my second reason!' responds Rabinovitch.

The dark side of the processes current in Eastern Europe is thus the gradual retreat of the liberal-democratic tendency in the face of the growth of corporate national populism with all its usual elements, from xenophobia to anti-Semitism. The swiftness of this process has been surprising: today, we find anti-Semitism in East Germany (where one attributes to Jews the lack of food, and to Vietnamese the lack of bicycles) and in Hungary and in Romania (where the persecution of the Hungarian minority also continues). Even in Poland we can perceive signs of a split within Solidarity: the rise of a nationalist-populist faction that imputes to the 'cosmopolitan intellectual' (the old regime's codeword for Jews) the failure of the recent government's measures.

### The Nation-Thing

To explain this unexpected turn, we have to rethink the most elementary notions about national identification—and here, psychoanalysis can be of help. The element that holds together a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking its members always implies a shared relationship toward a Thing, toward Enjoyment incarnated.<sup>2</sup> This relationship toward the

\* This essay is a revised version of a paper presented at the colloquium 'Ideology and Psychoanalysis', at the University of California, San Diego, on 28 April 1990. The author wishes to thank Perry Anderson, Fredric Jameson, Peter Wollen and Robin Blackburn for their helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, London 1989, pp. 175–6.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed elaboration of this notion of the Thing, see Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire VII—L'écriture de la psychanalyse*, Paris 1986. Note here that enjoyment (*jouissance*) is

Thing, structured by means of fantasies, is what is at stake when we speak of the menace to our 'way of life' presented by the Other: it is what is threatened when, for example, a white Englishman is panicked because of the growing presence of 'aliens'. What he wants to defend at any price is *not* reducible to the so-called set of values that offer support to national identity. National identification is by definition sustained by a relationship toward the Nation qua Thing. This Nation-Thing is determined by a series of contradictory properties. It appears to us as 'our Thing' (perhaps we could say *cosa nostra*), as something accessible only to us, as something 'they', the others, cannot grasp, but which is nonetheless constantly menaced by 'them'. It appears as what gives plenitude and vivacity to our life, and yet the only way we can determine it is by resorting to different versions of an empty tautology: all we can say about it is, ultimately, that the Thing is 'itself', 'the real Thing', 'what it really is about', and so on. If we are asked how we can recognize the presence of this Thing, the only consistent answer is that the Thing is present in that elusive entity called 'our way of life'. All we can do is enumerate disconnected fragments of the way our community organizes its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiation ceremonies—in short, all the details by which is made visible the unique way a community *organizes its enjoyment*. Although the first, so to speak, automatic, association that arises here is of course that of the reactionary, sentimental *Blut und Boden*, we should not forget that such a reference to a 'way of life' can also have a distinctive 'leftist' connotation. Note George Orwell's essays from the war years, in which he attempted to define the contours of an English patriotism opposed to the official, puffy-imperialist version of it: his points of reference were precisely those details that characterize the 'way of life' of the working class (the evening gathering in the local pub, and so forth).<sup>3</sup>

This paradoxical existence of an entity that 'is' only in so far as the subjects believe (in the other's belief) in its existence, is the mode of being proper to ideological Causes: the 'normal' order of causality is here inverted, since it is the Cause itself that is produced by its effects (the ideological practices that it animates). However, it is precisely at this point that the difference separating Lacan from 'discursive idealism' emerges most forcefully: Lacan is far from reducing the (national, etc.) Cause to a performative effect of the discursive practices that refer to it. The pure discursive effect doesn't have enough 'substance' to exert the attraction proper to a Cause; and the Lacanian term for

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<sup>3</sup> (*cont.*)

not to be equated with pleasure: enjoyment is precisely 'pleasure in unpleasure'; it designates the paradoxical satisfaction procured by a painful encounter with a Thing that perturbs the equilibrium of the 'pleasure principle'. In other words, enjoyment is located 'beyond the pleasure principle'.

<sup>3</sup> The way these fragments persist across ethnic barriers can be sometimes quite affecting as, for example, with Robert Mugabe who, when asked by a journalist what was the most precious legacy of British colonialism to Zimbabwe, answered without hesitation, 'cricket'—a senselessly ritualized game, almost beyond the grasp of a Continental, in which the prescribed gestures (or, more precisely, gestures established by an unwritten tradition)—the way to throw a ball, for example—appear grotesquely 'dysfunctional'.

the strange 'substance' that must be added to enable a Cause to obtain its positive ontological consistency—the only 'substance' acknowledged by psychoanalysis—is, of course, *enjoyment* (as Lacan states explicitly in his *Le Séminaire XX—Encore*). A nation exists only as long as its specific enjoyment continues to be materialized in certain social practices, and transmitted in national myths that structure these practices. To emphasize, in a 'deconstructivist' mode, that the Nation is not a biological or transhistorical fact but a contingent discursive construction, an overdetermined result of textual practices, is thus misleading: it overlooks the role of a remainder of some real, non-discursive kernel of enjoyment which must be present for the Nation *qua* discursive-entity-effect to achieve its ontological consistency.<sup>4</sup>

It would, however, be erroneous simply to reduce the national Thing to the features composing a specific 'way of life'. The Thing is not directly a collection of these features; there is 'something more' in it, something that *is present* in these features, that *appears* through them. Members of a community who partake in a given 'way of life' *believe in their Thing*, where this belief has a reflexive structure proper to the intersubjective space: 'I believe in the (national) Thing' is equal to 'I believe that others (members of my community) believe in the Thing.' The tautological character of the Thing—its semantic void, the fact that all we can say about it is that it is 'the real Thing'—is founded precisely in this paradoxical reflexive structure. The national Thing exists as long as members of the community believe in it; it is literally an effect of this belief in itself. The structure here is the same as that of the Holy Spirit in Christianity. The Holy Spirit *is* the community of believers in which Christ lives after his death; to believe in Him is to believe in belief itself—to believe that I'm not alone, that I'm a member of the community of believers. I do not need any external proof or confirmation of the truth of my belief: by the mere act of my belief in others' belief, the Holy Spirit is here. In other words, the whole meaning of the Thing consists in the fact that 'it means something' to people.

### Theft of Enjoyment

Nationalism thus presents a privileged domain of the eruption of enjoyment into the social field. The national Cause is ultimately nothing but the way subjects of a given ethnic community organize their enjoyment through national myths. What is therefore at stake in ethnic tensions is always the possession of the national Thing. We

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<sup>4</sup> The fact that a subject fully 'exists' only through enjoyment—that is, the ultimate coincidence of 'existence' and 'enjoyment'—was indicated in Lacan's early *Seminars* by the ambiguously traumatic status of existence: 'By definition, there is something so improbable about all existence that one is in effect perpetually questioning oneself about its reality.' (*The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, Cambridge 1988, p. 226.) This proposition becomes much clearer if we simply replace 'existence' with 'enjoyment' thus: 'By definition, there is something so improbable about all enjoyment that one is in effect perpetually questioning oneself about its reality.' The fundamental subjective position of a *hysteric* consists precisely in such a questioning about one's existence *qua* enjoyment, while a *sadistic pervers* avoids this questioning by transposing the 'pain of existence' on to the other (his *vicum*).

always impute to the 'other' an excessive enjoyment; s/he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the 'other' is the peculiar way it organizes its enjoyment: precisely the surplus, the 'excess' that pertains to it—the smell of their food, their 'noisy' songs and dances, their strange manners, their attitude to work (in the racist perspective, the 'other' is either a workaholic stealing our jobs or an idler living on our labour; and it is quite amusing to note the ease with which one passes from reproaching the other with a refusal to work, to reproaching him for the theft of work). The basic paradox is that our Thing is conceived as something inaccessible to the other, and at the same time threatened by it; this is also the case with castration, which, according to Freud, is experienced as something that 'really cannot happen', but we are nonetheless horrified by its prospect. The ground of incompatibility between different ethnic subject positions is thus not exclusively the different structure of their symbolic identifications. What categorically resists universalization is rather the particular structure of their relationship towards enjoyment:

Why does the Other remain Other? What is the cause for our hatred of him, for our hatred of him in his very being? It is hatred of the enjoyment in the Other. This would be the most general formula of the modern racism we are witnessing today: a hatred of the particular way the Other enjoys . . . The question of tolerance or intolerance is not at all concerned with the subject of science and its human rights. It is located on the level of tolerance or intolerance toward the enjoyment of the Other, the Other as he who essentially steals my own enjoyment. We know, of course, that the fundamental status of the object is to be always already snatched away by the Other. It is precisely this theft of enjoyment that we write down in shorthand as minus-Phi, the matheme of castration. The problem is apparently unsolvable as the Other is the Other in my interior. The root of racism is thus hatred of my own enjoyment. There is no other enjoyment but my own. If the Other is in me, occupying the place of extimacy, then the hatred is also my own.<sup>5</sup>

What we conceal by imputing to the Other the theft of enjoyment is the traumatic fact that *we never possessed what was allegedly stolen from us*: the lack ('castration') is original; enjoyment constitutes itself as 'stolen', or, to quote Hegel's precise formulation from his *Science of Logic*, it 'only comes to be through being left behind'.<sup>6</sup> Yugoslavia today is a case-study of such a paradox, in which we are witness to a detailed network of 'decantations' and 'thefts' of enjoyment. Every nationality has built its own mythology narrating how other nations deprive it of the vital part of enjoyment the possession of which would allow it to live fully. If we read all these mythologies together, we obtain Escher's well-known visual paradox of a network of basins where, following the principle of *perpetuum mobile*, water pours from one basin into another until the circle is closed, so that by moving the whole way downstream we find ourselves back at our starting point. These fantasies are structured in a complementary, symmetrical way. Slovenes

<sup>5</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Extimité', unpublished lecture, Paris, 27 November 1985.

<sup>6</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, Oxford 1975, p. 402.

are being deprived of their enjoyment by 'Southerners' (Serbians, Bosnians) because of their proverbial laziness, Balkan corruption, dirty and noisy enjoyment, and because they demand bottomless economic support, stealing from Slovenes their precious accumulation by means of which Slovenia could already have caught up with Western Europe. The Slovenes themselves, on the other hand, are supposed to rob Serbs because of their unnatural diligence, stiffness and selfish calculation; instead of yielding to simple life pleasures, Slovenes perversely enjoy constantly devising means of depriving Serbs of the results of their hard labour, by commercial profiteering, by reselling what they bought cheaply in Serbia. Slovenes are afraid that Serbs will 'inundate' them, and that they will thus lose their national identity. Serbs reproach Slovenes with their 'separatism', which means simply that Slovenes are not prepared to recognize themselves as a sub-species of Serb. To mark their difference from the 'Southerners', recent Slovenian popular historiography has been obsessed with proving that Slovenes are not really Slavs but in fact of Etruscan origin. Serbs, on the other hand, excel in proving how Serbia was a victim of 'Vatican-Comintern conspiracy': their *idée fixe* is that there was a secret joint plan of Catholics and Communists to destroy Serbian statehood. The basic premiss of both is of course 'We don't want anything foreign, we just want what rightfully belongs to us.' In both cases, the root of these fantasies is clearly hatred of one's own enjoyment. Slovenes, for example, repress their own enjoyment by means of obsessional activity, and it is this very enjoyment which returns in the real, in the figure of the dirty and easy-going 'Southerners'.<sup>7</sup>

This logic is, however, far from being limited to 'backward' Balkan conditions. The way that 'theft of enjoyment', or—to use a Lacanian technical term—imaginary castration, is an extremely useful notion for analysing today's ideological processes, can be further exemplified by a feature of the American ideology of the eighties: its obsession with the idea that there might still be some American POWs alive in Vietnam, leading a miserable existence, forgotten by their own country. This obsession articulated itself in a series of macho adventures of a hero undertaking a solitary rescue mission (*Rambo II: Missing In Action*). The fantasy-scenario supporting it is, however, far more interesting. It is as if down there, far away in the Vietnamese jungle, America has lost a precious part of itself, has been deprived of an essential element of its very life-substance, the essence of its potency; and as if this was the ultimate cause of its decline and impotence in the post-Vietnam War, Carter years, so that recapturing this stolen,

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<sup>7</sup> The mechanism at work here is of course that of *paranoia*. At its most elementary, paranoia consists in this very externalization of the function of castration in a positive agency appearing as the 'thief of enjoyment'. By means of a somewhat risky generalization of the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father (the elementary structure of paranoia, according to Lacan), we could perhaps sustain the thesis that Eastern Europe's national paranoia stems precisely from the fact that Eastern Europe's nations are not yet fully constituted as 'authentic states': it is as if the failed, foreclosed state's symbolic authority 'returns in the real' in the shape of the Other, the 'thief of enjoyment'.

forgotten part became a component of the Reaganesque reaffirmation of a strong America.<sup>8</sup>

### Antagonism and Enjoyment

What sets in motion this logic of the 'theft of enjoyment' is of course not immediate social reality—the reality of different ethnic communities living closely together—but the *inner antagonism inherent to these communities*. It is possible to have a multitude of ethnic communities living side by side without racial tensions (like today's California); on the other hand, one does not need a lot of 'real' Jews to impute to them some mysterious enjoyment that threatens us (it is well known that in Nazi Germany anti-Semitism was most ferocious in those parts where there were almost no Jews; in today's East Germany the anti-Semitic skinheads outnumber Jews by ten to one). Our perception of 'real' Jews is always mediated by a symbolic-ideological structure which tries to cope with social antagonism: the real 'secret' of the Jew is our own antagonism. In today's America, for example, a role resembling that of the Jew is being played more and more by the *Japanese*. Witness the obsession of the American media with the idea that the Japanese don't know how to enjoy themselves. The reason for Japan's increasing economic superiority over the USA is located in the somewhat mysterious fact that the Japanese don't consume enough, that they accumulate too much wealth. If we look closely at the logic of this accusation, it is clear that what American 'spontaneous' ideology really reproaches the Japanese for is not simply their inability to take pleasure, but the fact that their very relationship between work and enjoyment is strangely distorted. *It is as if they find enjoyment in their excessive renunciation of pleasure*, in their zeal, in their inability to 'take it easy', to relax and enjoy; and it is this attitude that is perceived as a threat to American supremacy. Which is why the American media report with such evident relief how the Japanese are finally learning to consume, and why American television depicts with such self-satisfaction Japanese tourists staring at the wonders of the American pleasure industry: they are finally 'becoming like us', learning our way to enjoy.

It is too easy to dispose of this problematic by pointing out that this is simply the transposition, the ideological displacement, of the effective socio-economic antagonisms of today's capitalism. The problem is that, while this is undoubtedly true, *it is precisely through such a displacement that desire is constituted*. What we gain by transposing the perception of inherent social antagonisms into this fascination by the Other

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<sup>8</sup> I am indebted for this idea to William Warner's paper 'Spectacular Action: Rambo, Reaganism, and the Cultural Articulation of the Hero', presented at the colloquium 'Psychoanalysis, Politics and the Image', at New York State University, Buffalo, on 8 November 1989. Incidentally, *Rambo II* is in this respect far inferior to *Rambo I*, which accomplishes an extremely interesting ideological re-articulation: it condenses in the same person the 'leftist' image of a lone hippy vagrant threatened by the small-town atmosphere embodied in a cruel sheriff, and the 'rightist' image of a lone avenger taking the law into his own hands and doing away with the corrupt bureaucratic machinery. This condensation implies, of course, the hegemony of the *second* figure, so that *Rambo I* succeeded in including in the 'rightist' articulation one of the crucial elements of the American 'leftist' political imaginary.



(Jew, Japanese) is the fantasy-organization of desire. The Lacanian thesis that enjoyment is ultimately always enjoyment of the Other—enjoyment supposed, imputed to the Other—and that, conversely, the hatred of the Other's enjoyment is always the hatred of one's own enjoyment, is perfectly exemplified by this logic of the 'theft of enjoyment'. What are fantasies about the Other's special, excessive enjoyment—about the Black's superior potency and sexual appetite, about the special relationship of Jews or Japanese towards money and work—if not precisely *so many ways, for us, to organize our own enjoyment?* Do we not find enjoyment precisely in fantasizing about the Other's enjoyment, in this ambivalent attitude towards it? Do we not obtain satisfaction by means of the very supposition that the Other enjoys in a way inaccessible to us? Is not the reason for the Other's enjoyment to exert such a powerful fascination, that in it we represent to ourselves our own innermost relationship with enjoyment? And, conversely, is the anti-Semitic capitalist's hatred of the Jew not the hatred of the excess that pertains to capitalism itself, that which is produced by its inherent antagonistic nature? Is capitalism's hatred of the Jew not the hatred of its own innermost, essential feature? For this reason, it is not sufficient to point out who the racist's Other presents a threat to our identity. We should rather invert this proposition: the fascinating image of the Other personifies our own innermost split—what is already 'in us more than ourselves'—and thus prevents us from achieving full identity with ourselves. *The hatred of the Other is the hatred of our own excess of enjoyment.*

### How the Real 'Returns to Its Place'

The national Thing thus functions as a kind of '*particular Absolute*' resisting universalization, bestowing its special 'tonality' upon every neutral, universal notion. It is for this reason that the eruption of the national Thing in all its violence has always taken by surprise the devotees of international solidarity. Perhaps the most notable case was the disastrous collapse of international solidarity within the worker's movement in the face of 'patriotic' euphoria at the outbreak of the First World War. Today, it is difficult to imagine what a traumatic shock it was for the leaders of all currents of social democracy and socialism, from Eduard Bernstein to Lenin, when the social-democratic parties of all countries (with the exception of the Bolsheviks in Russia and Serbia) gave way to chauvinist outbursts, and stood 'patriotically' behind 'their' respective governments, oblivious of the proclaimed solidarity of the working class 'without country'. This shock, the *powerless fascination* felt by its participants, bears witness to an encounter with the Real of enjoyment. That is to say, the basic paradox is that these chauvinist outbursts of 'patriotic feeling' were far from unexpected. Years before the actual outbreak of the War, social democracy drew the attention of workers to the fact that imperialist forces were preparing for a new world war, and warned against yielding to 'patriotic' chauvinism. Even at the very outbreak of hostilities, in the days following the Sarajevo assassination, the German social democrats cautioned workers that the ruling class would use the assassination as an excuse to declare war. Furthermore, the Socialist International adopted a formal resolution obliging all its members to

vote against war credits. When war broke out, international solidarity vanished into thin air. An anecdote showing how this overnight reversal took Lenin by surprise is significant: when he saw the daily newspaper of German social democracy announcing on its front page that the social-democratic deputies had voted for the war credits, he was at first convinced that the issue had been fabricated by German police to lead workers astray!

And it is the same in today's Eastern Europe. The 'spontaneous' presupposition was that what is 'repressed' there, what will burst out once the lid of 'totalitarianism' is removed, will be *democratic desire* in all its forms, from political pluralism to flourishing market economy. What we are getting instead, now that the lid is removed, are more and more ethnic conflicts, based upon the constructions of different 'thieves of enjoyment': as if, beneath the Communist surface, there glimmered a wealth of 'pathological' fantasies, waiting for their moment to arrive—a perfect exemplification of the Lacanian notion of communication, where the speaker gets back from the addressee his own message in its true, inverted form. The emergence of ethnic Causes breaks the narcissistic spell of the West's complacent recognition of its own values in the East: Eastern Europe is returning to the West the 'repressed' truth of its democratic desire. And what we should point out is, again, the *powerless fascination* of (what remains of) the critical leftist intellectuals when faced with this outburst of national enjoyment. They are, of course, reluctant to embrace fully the national Cause; they are desperately trying to maintain a kind of distance from it. This distance is, however, false: a disavowal of the fact that their desire is already *implied*, caught in it.

Far from being produced by the radical break in Eastern Europe, an obsessive adherence to the national Cause is precisely what *remains the same* throughout this process—what, for example, Ceausescu and the now ascendant radical rightist-nationalist tendencies in Romania have in common. Here we encounter the Real, that which 'always returns to its place' (Lacan), the kernel that persists unchanged in the midst of the radical change in society's symbolic identity. It is therefore wrong to conceive this rise of nationalism as a kind of 'reaction' to the alleged Communist betrayal of national roots: the common idea that because Communist power ripped out the entire traditional fabric of society, the only remaining point on which to base resistance is national identity. It was already Communist power which *produced* the compulsive attachment to the national Cause, an attachment that became more exclusive the more totalitarian the power structure. The most extreme cases are to be found in Ceausescu's Romania, in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, in North Korea and in Albania.<sup>9</sup> The ethnic Cause is thus the leftover that persists once the network of Communist ideological fabric disintegrates. We can detect it in the

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<sup>9</sup> This attachment is not without its comical side effects. Because of his Albanian origins, John Belushi, the very embodiment of Hollywood 'decadence', who died of a drugs overdose, enjoys today a cult status in Albania: the official media praise him as a 'great patriot and humanist' who was 'always ready to embrace the just and progressive causes of humanity'!

way the figure of the Enemy is constructed in today's Romania, for example: Communism is treated as a foreign body, as the Intruder which poisoned and corrupted the sane Body of the Nation; as something that really could not have its origins in our own ethnic tradition, and which therefore has to be cut off for the sanity of the Nation's Body to be restored. The anti-Semitic connotation is here unmistakable: in the Soviet Union, the Russian nationalist organization, *Pamyat*, likes to count the number of Jews in Lenin's Politburo, in order to prove its 'non-Russian' character. A popular pastime in Eastern Europe is no longer simply to put all the blame on Communists, but to play the game 'who was *behind* the Communists?' (Jews for Russians and Romanians; Croats and Slovenes for Serbs; and so on). This construction of the Enemy reproduces in its pure—so to speak, distilled—form, the way the Enemy was constructed in the late Communist nationalist-totalitarian regimes: what we get, once we overthrow the Communist symbolic form, is the underlying relation to the ethnic Cause, stripped of this form.

### Mastering the Excess

So, why this unexpected disappointment? Why does authoritarian nationalism overshadow democratic pluralism? Why the chauvinist obsession with the 'theft of enjoyment', instead of openness towards ethnic diversity? Because, at this point, the Left's standard analysis of the causes of ethnic tensions in the 'real socialist' countries proved to be wrong. Its thesis was that ethnic tensions were instigated and manipulated by the ruling Party bureaucracy as a means of legitimizing their hold on power. In Romania, for example, the nationalist obsession, the dream of Great Romania, the forceful assimilation of Hungarian and other minorities, created a constant tension which legitimized Ceausescu's hold on power. In Yugoslavia, the growing tensions between Serbs and Albanians, Croats and Serbs, Slovenes and Serbs, and so on, illustrate how corrupted local bureaucracies can prolong their power by presenting themselves as sole defenders of national interests. This hypothesis was refuted, however, in a most spectacular way by the recent events: once the rule of the Communist bureaucracies was broken, ethnic tensions emerged even more forcefully. So, why does this attachment to the ethnic Cause *persist* even after the power structure that produced it has collapsed? Here, a combined reference to the classical Marxist theory of capitalism and to Lacanian psychoanalysis might be of help.

The elementary feature of capitalism consists in its *inherent structural imbalance*, its innermost antagonistic character: the constant crisis, the incessant revolutionizing of its conditions of existence. Capitalism has no 'normal', balanced state: its 'normal' state is the permanent production of an excess—the only way for it to survive is to expand. Capitalism is thus caught in a kind of loop, a vicious circle, that was clearly designated already by Marx: it produces more than does any other socio-economic formation to satisfy needs, but the result is the creation of even more needs to be satisfied; the more wealth it creates, the greater is the need to create even more wealth. It should be clear from that why Lacan designated capitalism the reign of the *discourse of the*

*Hysteric*: this vicious circle of a desire, whose apparent satisfaction only widens the gap of its dissatisfaction, is what defines hysteria. There exists effectively a kind of structural homology between capitalism and the Freudian notion of superego. The basic paradox of the superego also concerns a certain structural imbalance: the more we obey its command, the more we feel guilty; so that renunciation entails only a demand for more renunciation, repentance more guilt—as in capitalism, where a growth of production to fill out the lack, only increases the lack.

It is against this background that we should grasp the logic of what Lacan calls the (discourse of the ) *Master*: its role is precisely to introduce *balance*, to *regulate the excess*. Precapitalist societies were still able to dominate the structural imbalance proper to the superego in so far as their dominant discourse was that of the Master. In his last works, Michel Foucault showed how the ancient Master embodied the ethics of self-mastery and 'just measure': the entire tradition of precapitalist ethics aimed at preventing the excess proper to the human libidinal economy from exploding. With capitalism, however, this function of the Master is suspended, and the vicious circle of the superego revolves freely.

Now, it should also be clear where the corporatist temptation comes from; that is, why this temptation in the necessary reverse of capitalism. Let us take the ideological edifice of fascist corporatism: the fascist dream is simply to have *capitalism without its 'excess', without the antagonism that causes its structural imbalance*. Which is why we have, in fascism, on one hand, the return to the figure of the Master—Leader—who guarantees the stability and balance of the social fabric, who again saves us from the society's structural imbalance; and, on the other hand, the reason for this imbalance is projected into the figure of the Jew whose 'excessive' accumulation and greed are deemed the cause of social antagonism. The dream is thus that, since the excess was introduced from outside—the work of an alien intruder—its elimination would enable us to obtain once again a stable social organism whose parts form a harmonious corporate body, where, in contrast to capitalism's constant social *displacement*, everybody would again occupy *their own place*. The function of the Master is to dominate the excess by locating its cause in a clearly delimited social agency: 'It is *they* who steal our enjoyment, who, by means of their excessive attitude, introduce imbalance and antagonism.' With the figure of the Master, the antagonism *inherent* to the social structure is transformed into the relationship of power, in the struggle for *domination* between *us* and *them*, the cause of antagonistic imbalance.

### Capitalism Without Capitalism

Perhaps this matrix helps us also to grasp the re-emergence of national chauvinism in Eastern Europe as a kind of 'shock absorber' against the sudden exposure to capitalist openness and imbalance. It is as if, in the very moment when the bond, the chain, preventing the free development of capitalism—a deregulated production of the excess—was broken, it was countered by a *demand for a new Master* to

bridle it. The demand is for the establishment of a stable and clearly defined social Body that will restrain capitalism's destructive potential by cutting off the 'excessive' element; and since this social Body is experienced as that of a Nation, the cause of imbalance 'spontaneously' assumes the form of a 'national enemy'.

When the democratic opposition was still fighting against Communist power, it united under the sign of 'civil society' all the 'anti-totalitarian' elements, from the Church to the leftist intellectuals. Within the 'spontaneous' experience of the unity of this fight, the crucial fact passed unnoticed: that the same words used by all participants refer to two fundamentally different languages, to two different worlds.<sup>20</sup> Now that the opposition has won, this victory necessarily assumes the shape of a split: the enthusiastic solidarity of the fight against Communist power has lost its mobilizing potential; the fissure separating the two political universes cannot be concealed anymore. This fissure is of course that of the well-known couple *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*: traditional, organically linked community versus 'alienated' society which dissolves all organic links. The problem of Eastern Europe's nationalist populism is that it perceived Communism's 'threat' from the perspective of *Gemeinschaft*—as a foreign body corroding the organic texture of the national community; it thereby actually imputes to Communism the crucial feature of capitalism itself. In its moralistic opposition to the Communist 'depravity', the nationalist-populist moral majority unknowingly *prolongs* the thrust of the previous Communist regime toward state qua organic community. The desire at work in this symptomatic substitution of Communism for capitalism is a desire for capitalism-*cum-Gemeinschaft*: a desire for capitalism without the 'alienated' civil society, without the formal-external relations between individuals. Fantasies about the 'theft of enjoyment',

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<sup>20</sup> What we have here can be grasped by means of the Lacanian opposition, 'subject of the enunciation/subject of the enunciation' ( *sujet d'énonciation/sujet d' énonciation*): the same enunciation (demands for freedom and democracy, and so forth) is supported by a totally different position of the enunciation, is spoken from a totally different horizon of meaning. In Slovenia today, this fissure appears in an exemplary way apropos of the motto 'national reconciliation' proposed by the opposition: the desire to overcome old traumas of national division that result from Communist rule. Now that the opposition has won, it has become clear that this motto functions in two opposed ways. Both sides agree that the only way to cut short the circle of revenge, the wild *acting out* of old hatreds, is a 'working through' of the traumatic past: one should confront in broad daylight the demons of the past; long-repressed memories should become part of the nation's history-narrative. The aims to be achieved *via* such a 'working through', however, differ radically. One conceives 'reconciliation' as a means to achieve new national unity, organic solidarity, the recognition of all Slovenes in a new 'dream' of a common destiny. Within this perspective, past victims of the Communist oppression function like ritual animals whose sacrifice guarantees present unity; those who oppose this unity *so this* betray their sacrifice. Whereas for the others 'reconciliation' means precisely reconciliation with the fact that there is no organic unity of Slovenes; that the multitude of 'dreams' is irreducible, that nobody has the right to enforce his/her own dream on the others. One must accept the traumatic fact that past victims were utterly unnecessary, that there was no 'meaning' in them. Referring to the conceptual apparatus articulated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Verso, London 1985), we could say that perhaps the crucial hegemonic fight in Slovenia today is the fight for 'national reconciliation', for the appropriation of this 'floating signifier'.

the re-emergence of anti-Semitism, and so on, are the price to be paid for this impossible desire.

Paradoxically, we could say that what Eastern Europe needs most now is *more alienation*: the establishment of an 'alienated' state that would maintain its distance from civil society, that would be 'formal', 'empty', embodying no particular ethnic community's dream (and thus keeping the space open for them all). Otherwise, the vision depicted by Margaret Atwood in her *The Handmaid's Tale*, the vision of a near-future 'Republic of Gilead' where a moral-majority fundamentalism reigns, will come closer to being realized in Eastern Europe than in the USA itself.

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## Blacks and the US Constitution 1789–1989

On 4 July 1854, the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison addressed a large Independence Day gathering at Framingham, Massachusetts.\* One month earlier, a federal tribunal in Boston had ordered Anthony Burns, a fugitive from slavery, to be returned to his Virginia owner. Garrison had a long-established reputation for outraging respectable opinion by his militant condemnation of slavery and its defenders, North and South. But on this day, he outdid himself. First, he burned a copy of the fugitive-slave law of 1850, under which Burns had been returned to bondage. Then he burned the court decision. Finally, he held aloft 'the parent of all the other atrocities'—the US Constitution. Calling it 'a covenant with death, an agreement with hell', Garrison set it on fire.

Garrison, of course, was neither the first nor the last American to believe that the Constitution's provisions regarding slavery fatally undermined its claim to 'establish justice' and promote the 'general welfare'. During the

recent commemoration of the Constitution's bicentennial, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall pointedly reminded the country of those excluded from the founders' definition of human rights. Marshall, one suspects, was reacting not simply to the unrelentingly celebratory nature of the occasion, but to the charge by Attorney General Edwin Meese, rejected Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork, and other conservatives, that federal judges should confine themselves to implementing the 'original intent' of the Constitution's framers. Not all Americans, Marshall suggested, consider that intent entirely benign.

In an age of semiotics and deconstruction, not to mention intense debate among historians about the prevailing ideas of the revolutionary era, there is something refreshingly naive, almost quaint, in the idea that any text, including the Constitution, possesses a single, easily ascertainable, objective meaning. Of course, the call for a jurisprudence of 'original intent' is less a carefully-thought-out intellectual stance than a political rallying cry, a justification for the undoing of modern Supreme Court decisions that have broadened the definition of constitutional rights, especially for black Americans. Whether the Supreme Court *should* be bound by the 'original intent' of the Constitutional text is a political, not a historical question. But the current debate over originalism does have the virtue of directing our attention to the two interrelated issues with which this article is concerned: the history of constitutional law and Supreme Court decisions concerning Afro-Americans; and how differing understandings of that history continue to play a central part in the debate over civil rights. Rather than attempting the impossible task of surveying all of American history, what follows will focus on three key moments: the Constitutional Convention itself; the rewriting of the Constitution during Reconstruction; and the most recent rulings of the Supreme Court.

When the struggle for independence began, slavery was already an old institution in America. For well over a century, slaves had tilled the tobacco fields of Virginia and Maryland; for nearly as long they had laboured on the rice plantations of coastal South Carolina. Slaves also worked on small farms in parts of the North, and in many artisan shops in cities like New York and Philadelphia. Taking the nation as a whole, one American in five was a black slave in 1776. Among both blacks and whites, the Revolution inspired widespread hopes that slavery might be removed from American life. With the British offering freedom to slaves who joined the royal cause, tens of thousands fled their owners and gained their liberty. Thousands of others escaped bondage by enlisting in the Revolutionary Army. During the 1780s a considerable number of Southern slaveholders, especially in Virginia and Maryland, voluntarily emancipated their slaves. By the early nineteenth century every state from Pennsylvania north to New Hampshire had taken steps to abolish slavery. Nonetheless, the stark fact is that there were considerably more slaves at the end of the revolutionary era than at the beginning. The first national census, in

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1790, revealed that the half-million slave population of 1776 had grown to some 700,000.

American statesmen, including slaveholders like Washington and Jefferson, were fully aware that slavery blatantly violated the Revolution's professed ideals. But to call slavery an ambiguity, or even a contradiction, in the minds of the founders is to fail to confront the institution's centrality in late-eighteenth-century America, and the strength of the barriers to abolition. Slavery was already the foundation of social and economic life in the Southern states. Racism was well entrenched nationwide. And in an era that saw ownership of property as the basis of individual freedom, the sanctity of property rights formed a powerful bulwark of slavery. This was demonstrated not only by the failure of abolition in the South, but by its slowness in the North, where slavery was peripheral to the economy. In New York, for example, the emancipation law of 1799 freed no living slave; it merely provided for the liberty of any child born to a slave mother, and only after he or she had served the mother's master until adulthood as compensation for the owner's future loss of property rights.

#### The Constitutional Convention of 1787

The fifty-five men who gathered at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 included numerous slaveholders, as well as some dedicated abolitionists. As James Madison recorded, in many of the debates 'the institution of slavery and its consequences formed the line of discrimination'. Although their implications are often misunderstood, the Constitution's key provisions regarding slavery are easily summarized. First, Congress was prohibited from abolishing the importation of slaves into the country for twenty years. Second, the states were required to return to their owners all fugitives from bondage. Third, in determining each state's representation in the House of Representatives and its electoral votes for President, three-fifths of the slaves would be counted along with the free population. It should be noted that in deference to the sensibilities of some delegates, the words 'slave' and 'slavery' did not appear in the original Constitution; instead, such terms were used as 'other persons' and persons 'held to service or labour'. As Luther Martin, a Maryland attorney who attended the Constitutional Convention but bitterly opposed ratification, wrote, his fellow delegates 'anxiously sought to avoid the admission of expressions which might be odious in the ears of Americans.' But, he went on, they were 'willing to admit into their system those *things* which the *expressions* signified.'

Clearly the Constitution's slavery clauses were compromises, efforts to find a middle ground between the institution's critics and defenders. But the Southern states had the advantage that they would not agree to a Constitution that threatened slavery, while abolition was a minor concern to most Northerners. Thus it should not be surprising that taken together, these clauses strengthened the institution of slavery, and left it even more deeply embedded in American life and politics. The slave-trade clause allowed a commerce condemned by civilized society, and against which laws had been passed by the Continental

Congress and most of the states, to continue into the nineteenth century. Partly to replace slaves who had escaped to the British, and partly because of the expansion of cotton production after the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, South Carolina and Georgia took advantage of the twenty-year hiatus before abolition of the trade, to import some 40,000 additional Africans—about 10 per cent of all slaves brought to British North America from colonial times to 1808. The fugitive-slave clause accorded slave laws 'extraterritoriality'—that is, that the condition of bondage adhered to a person even if he or she escaped to a jurisdiction where slavery had been abolished. It made all the states, and the federal government, complicit in maintaining the institution's stability. The three-fifths clause allowed the white South to exercise far greater power in national affairs than its numbers warranted. It produced, said Luther Martin, 'the absurdity of increasing the power of a State in making laws for free men in proportion as that State violated the rights of freedom.' Partly as a result, all but four of the first sixteen presidential elections between 1788 and 1848 placed a Southern slaveholder in the White House. It is worth noting that the much-maligned Articles of Confederation, which the Constitution replaced, had no three-fifths clause magnifying Southern political power, and no fugitive-slave clause (although it did require states to surrender persons charged with 'treason, felony, or other high misdemeanor'). Whatever its other merits, the Constitution represented a step backwards when it came to slavery.

The government's federal structure under the Constitution, moreover, insulated slavery from outside interference. Many of the founders, of course, had become disgusted with the weakness of the central government under the Articles of Confederation, and obsessed with the danger of what Madison called 'democratic despotism' in the states, reflected in laws suspending the collection of debts and making paper money legal tender. They hoped the Constitutional Convention would create a stronger national government able to act as a brake on the turbulence and unpredictability of state politics. Madison, indeed, unsuccessfully proposed to give Congress the authority to overturn state laws—an idea that would have had immense, if unintended, implications for slavery. But while the Constitution strengthened national authority, it did not create a centralized nation-state. In 1816 the federal government employed fewer than 5,000 persons, two-thirds of them in the post office; and such crucial concerns of government as taxation, education, and the definition and protection of citizens' rights, were left to state and local authorities. The Bill of Rights, which protected basic liberties against infringement by the national government but not the states, indicated that most Americans still believed centralized government posed the greatest threat to their liberties.

### The Legacy of the Founding Fathers

'For all that is contained in this constitution,' an anonymous Pennsylvania pamphleteer noted in 1787, 'this country may remain degraded by this impious custom till the end of time.' This indisputable fact posed a severe challenge for the antislavery movement that emerged in

the nineteenth century. Some abolitionists, like Garrison, branded the Constitution proslavery and called for its abrogation. A few, such as Lysander Spooner, developed an elaborate if unpersuasive argument to show that under the Constitution slavery was in fact illegal. Spooner relied on the Fifth Amendment, which barred the federal government from depriving any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. Ultimately, however, his position rested on the supremacy of natural rights to the Constitution. Many proponents of antislavery politics, like Salmon P. Chase and Abraham Lincoln, took a middle view, insisting that the founding fathers had hoped for the institution's 'ultimate extinction', and had done nothing to prevent abolition by the individual states. The Constitution, Chase insisted, created no federal responsibility for slavery—a position difficult to reconcile with the fugitive-slave clause. The fact that the Constitution rendered the national government powerless to interfere directly with slavery did much to shape subsequent antislavery politics, steering it toward a focus on preventing slavery's expansion into the territories, where Congress did possess the authority to act, and not the states where slavery actually existed.

Frederick Douglass, who originally held the Garrisonian view of a proslavery Constitution, subsequently changed his mind, although his tortuous logic suggests that his motivation lay in political expediency rather than deep conviction. The founders' original intent, Douglass argued, was proslavery, but the text itself did not prohibit federal action against bondage. Hence, the Garrisonians were wrong to oppose political involvement by abolitionists. Douglass held to this position throughout the 1850s, even as a more nationalistic group of black abolitionists turned the idea of a proslavery Constitution into an argument for emigration from the United States. Far from being a 'foreign element' in American life or some kind of aberration, insisted H. Ford Douglass, slavery had received the sanction of the founding fathers, and blacks could never secure equality in America.

Did blacks form part of the 'We the People' who created the Constitution? Or were they simply 'other persons' outside the political nation? For most of the antebellum period, the power to define citizenship rights rested with the states. And despite their differences regarding the national Constitution, abolitionists, white and black, worked tirelessly to secure legal recognition of Northern blacks' equality before the law. They faced, to say the least, an uphill struggle. The North's tiny black community, amounting to only 1 per cent of the region's population on the eve of the Civil War, was subjected to discrimination in every phase of its life. Despite the spread of antislavery sentiment, Northern racism seemed to deepen as the century progressed. Perhaps this was inevitable in a nation whose economic growth rested in large measure on slave labour, and whose territorial expansion involved the dispossession of one non-white people, the Indians, and the conquest of lands inhabited by another, the Mexicans. By 1860, five Northern states had prohibited all blacks from entering their territory. Democracy itself increasingly took on a racial definition. Between 1800 and 1860, every free state but Maine that entered the Union, beginning with Ohio in 1803, restricted voting to white males. Among

older states, even as property qualifications for whites faded, blacks found their political rights more and more restricted. New York in 1821 eliminated the property qualification for white voters, but raised the requirement for blacks to the then extremely high sum of \$250. Pennsylvania, home of an articulate, economically successful black community in Philadelphia, eliminated black voting entirely in 1837. In effect, during the first half of the nineteenth century, race supplanted class as the line of division between men who could vote and those who could not.

This melancholy history forms the background for the most famous pre-Civil War Supreme Court pronouncement relating to blacks' rights under the Constitution, the *Dred Scott* decision. In effect, Chief Justice Roger A. Taney turned the arguments of antislavery constitutionalists on their head. Far from securing the freedom of the slaves by its protection of individual liberty, the Fifth Amendment, by its guarantee of property rights, prevented Congress from barring slavery's extension into any territory. Judge Bork, in his new book, calls this the 'worst constitutional decision of the nineteenth century' (the twentieth century's 'worst', it will surprise no one to hear, was *Roe v. Wade*, legalizing abortion). But Bork, interestingly enough, says nothing about Taney's attempt to explore the founders' original intent, and his famous conclusion that under the Constitution no black person could be a citizen of the United States. The Court, Taney argued, must be guided by the racial views of the Revolutionary generation, and blacks, 'were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority . . . They had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.' A state could accord blacks rights if it wished, but the Constitution did not require other states to accord them, like whites, the 'privileges and immunities' of citizens. To the historian, Taney's interpretation of the founders' intentions regarding blacks is certainly plausible. *Dred Scott* may have been morally reprehensible, but it was good constitutional law, at least if good constitutional law means continually re-enacting the principles and prejudices of the founding fathers.

### Reconstruction: Rewriting the Constitution

What swept *Dred Scott* into the dustbin of history, of course, was not a reinterpretation of the founders' views, but the greatest cataclysm in US history. The Civil War and Reconstruction produced not simply three Amendments, but a fundamentally new Constitution. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments abolished slavery; established a national citizenship whose rights, enforced by the federal government, were to be enjoyed equally by all Americans; and protected the right to vote of black men. These measures altered the definition of American citizenship, transformed the federal system, and engrafted into the Constitution a principle of racial equality entirely unprecedented in both jurisprudence and political reality before 1860.

Two developments during the Civil War were responsible for placing the issue of black citizenship on the national agenda. One was the

process of emancipation itself, and especially the massive enrolment of blacks into the Union armed forces. The 'logical result' of black military service, one Senator observed in 1864, was that 'the black man is henceforth to assume a new status among us.' The second was a profound alteration in the nature of American government. The mobilization of the North's resources for modern war created what one Republican called 'a new government', with greatly expanded powers and responsibilities. And the war inspired a broad nationalism, embraced above all by the antislavery reformers, black and white, and Radical Republicans in Congress. With emancipation, these men and women believed, the federal government had become not a threat to individual liberty, but the 'custodian of freedom'.

The Amendments and civil-rights laws reflected the intersection of these two products of the Civil War era—the newly empowered national state and the idea of a national citizenship enjoying equality before the law. The Thirteenth Amendment, which became part of the Constitution in 1865, irrevocably abolished slavery (for the first time given its actual name in the Constitution rather than being mentioned via circumlocution), and empowered Congress to enforce emancipation with 'appropriate legislation'. The Amendment raised a question fundamental to political and social debate during Reconstruction: the definition of freedom. 'What is freedom?' asked Congressman James A. Garfield. 'Is it the bare privilege of not being chained? . . . If this is all, then freedom is a bitter mockery, a cruel delusion.' The former slaves understood freedom to mean personal autonomy, economic independence and equal rights as citizens. Congressional Republicans, under the impact of the continuing political crisis of Reconstruction, moved first toward equality before the law and equal rights for blacks as free labourers in the economic marketplace, then to a broader vision of equal political participation, and finally equal access to public accommodations.

This is not the occasion to trace the tangled history of social conflict and constitutional change during Reconstruction. Since recent debate has focused on the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment, I will confine myself here to these. The Civil Rights Act defined all persons born in the United States (except Indians) as national citizens, and spelled out rights they were to enjoy without regard to race—including making contracts, bringing lawsuits, owning property and receiving equal treatment before the courts and by government officials. No action by a state, or local custom, could deprive an individual of these basic rights; if it did, state officials would be held accountable in federal court.

At the most basic level, the Civil Rights Act aimed to overturn the *Dred Scott* decision and to invalidate the South's recently enacted Black Codes, which severely limited the freedmen's economic prospects and standing before the law. The first statutory definition of freedom under the Thirteenth Amendment, its listing of specific rights, focused on those central to the Republicans' free labour ideology: the right to choose one's employment, enforce payment of wages, and compete on equal terms for advancement in the economic marketplace. But beyond these, Republicans also rejected the entire idea of legal distinctions

among citizens based on race, and the Act invalidated many discriminatory laws on the Northern statute book as well as in the South. The underlying assumption that the federal government possessed the power to define and protect citizens' rights was a striking departure in American law. Indeed, declared President Andrew Johnson, who vetoed the bill only to see it re-enacted by Congress, federal protection of blacks' civil rights and the broad conception of national power that lay behind it, violated 'all our experience as a people'. Moreover, Johnson went on, clothing blacks with the privileges of citizenship discriminated against whites—'the distinction of race and colour is by the bill made to operate in favour of the colored and against the white race.'

Unlike the Civil Rights Act, which listed specific rights no state could violate, the Fourteenth Amendment, approved by Congress in June 1866, sought to establish equality among citizens in general language. Its heart was the first section, which prohibited the states from abridging citizens' 'privileges and immunities', depriving any person of life, liberty or property without 'due process of law', or denying 'equal protection of the laws'. Because of its broad, elusive wording, the Amendment's meaning has probably inspired more disagreement than any other clause of the Constitution. Proponents of 'original intent' castigate the modern Supreme Court for 'judicial activism' in interpreting its provisions. Attorney General Meese criticized the Court for adopting the legal doctrine known as 'incorporation'—that the Amendment requires the states to respect the prohibitions on the abuse of power originally applied to the federal government by the Bill of Rights. Judge Bork believes the Amendment aimed only to protect blacks against explicitly discriminatory state and local laws; any other use is an example of judges substituting their views for those of the framers. Meese, Bork and others are reluctant to take the Amendment at face value, as a statement of general principle rather than an enactment of specific legislative purposes, because they fear this would leave too much leeway for judicial interpretation. They see the Fourteenth Amendment as a minor adjustment to the Constitution, not a change in its basic structure. Their cramped reading reminds me of a recent Herblock cartoon depicting Justices Rehnquist, Scalia and other worthies, with the caption, 'They revere the Constitution, it's just some of the Amendments they don't like.'

### Misinterpretation and Retreat

It is most ironic that proponents of 'original intent'—a principle that explicitly appeals to history to guide judicial rulings—apparently know nothing of the actual history of Reconstruction. For if anything is clear from the historical record, it is that Congress chose intentionally broad, indeterminate language precisely to allow leeway for interpreting and implementing the Amendment, and that it envisioned an active role for the federal judiciary in enforcement. It is certainly true, as Bork argues, that Congress did not expect the courts perpetually to frustrate the will of state legislatures. But to leave it at this ignores an obvious but often neglected point. The men who made the Fourteenth Amendment expected the states to abide by it. Indeed, in the now-forgotten third section they moved to limit political power in the

South to genuine supporters of the Union who, they believed, would respect the Amendment's provisions, rendering national enforcement unnecessary. Nobody anticipated that nearly a century of nullification would follow Reconstruction. But if national action to protect citizens' rights did become necessary, Congress placed a good part of the burden on the federal courts. Reconstruction witnessed an unprecedented enlargement of the jurisdiction of the federal judiciary. In the absence of a standing army, national police force, or permanent Freedmen's Bureau, this seemed the best means of guaranteeing the basic rights of American citizens against violations by the states. Thus, the judicial activism of the past generation is really in keeping with the intentions of the Amendment's framers.

The redefinition of federalism and establishment of a national principle of equality before the law worked a profound transformation in blacks' political outlook. Before 1860, most blacks had feared federal power, since the government at Washington seemed to be controlled by the Slave Power. Indeed some Northern states in effect nullified the national fugitive-slave law before the Civil War. But with emancipation and equal rights coming through unprecedented exercises of central authority, blacks fully embraced the nationalism of the Civil War era. Until Americans abandoned the idea of 'the right of each State to control its own affairs,' wrote Frederick Douglass, 'no general assertion of human rights can be of any practical value.' The states' inability to suppress political violence during Reconstruction reinforced this tendency to look to Washington for salvation. This identification with the national government, reinforced during the modern civil-rights movement, remains to this day a major difference between black and white political traditions. Their distinct historical experience leads most blacks to fear unrestrained localism far more than an activist government at Washington, even while, as President Reagan demonstrated, talk of curbing national authority can still, two centuries after the American Revolution, galvanize white voters.

Even in the 1870s, in fact, the retreat from Reconstruction was fuelled by a growing sense in the North that the federal government had grown too powerful, and that blacks were in danger of becoming, in the then-current phrase, 'permanent wards' of the national state. And of course, in the abandonment of a national commitment to equal rights, the Supreme Court played a major and sorry role. Beginning with the Slaughterhouse Cases in 1873, the Court progressively restricted the rights protected under the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1883 came the Civil Rights Cases, invalidating a law prohibiting discrimination in public accommodations. Then, in 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson* decreed that state-mandated racial segregation did not violate the equal protection clause. By the turn of the century, the states had been given carte blanche to nullify the Reconstruction amendments and civil-rights laws. Not until our own time did a great mass movement and a socially conscious Supreme Court again breathe life into the racial egalitarianism, and the broad view of citizens' rights, that arose during Reconstruction.

To those who came of age during the era of the Warren Court, it is

easy to forget that the Supreme Court, expected by the founding fathers to be the most conservative branch of government, has amply fulfilled that role throughout most of US history. And today the Court appears poised to revert to its traditional function. If the civil-rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was often called the second Reconstruction, we now seem to have entered a second Redemption—as the restoration of white supremacy was called in the late-nineteenth-century South. Just as the Supreme Court slowly eviscerated the legal structure of the first Reconstruction, today's Court has begun to do the same for the second. A brief look at key decisions of the Court's last term will illustrate how.

### The Second Redemption: Recent Rulings of the Supreme Court

Rather than voting rights, access to public accommodations, and segregation—the focal points of earlier civil-rights litigation—the cases of 1989 turned on bread-and-butter issues: the right to hold a job and advance through promotion, and the responsibility of government and private employers to redress the past exclusion of blacks and other groups from large segments of the labour market. Unlike the celebrated *Bakke Case*, which centred on admission to medical school, the 1989 plaintiffs included bank tellers, firemen, cannery workers and construction contractors—representatives, as it were, of millions of working-class and lower-middle-class blacks. In the most publicized case, *Brenda Patterson v. McLean Credit Union*, a black teller who suffered racial harassment on the job sued for damages under the Civil Rights Act of 1866. The Court rejected her claim for punitive damages, contending that the law barred discrimination only at the moment of signing a contract; once Patterson was on the job, it did not apply. In another case, the Court ruled against a group of Filipino and Eskimo workers at an Alaska salmon cannery who presented evidence that unskilled jobs were monopolized by non-whites while the company confined skilled positions to whites. Such statistical disparities, the Court said, do not provide prima facie evidence of discriminatory intent. The Court also overturned a Richmond law reserving 30 per cent of city construction contracts for minority businesses, and allowed a group of white Birmingham firefighters to bring a suit against a programme previously adopted by the city fire department that set goals for the hiring and promotion of blacks. At the same time, the Justices refused to allow a challenge to changes in AT&T's seniority system that adversely affected women employees, on the grounds that too much time had passed to initiate litigation.

Taken together, these decisions suggest some ominous conclusions about the Court's reading of the law, and of American history. Five judges (Rehnquist, White, O'Connor, Scalia, and Kennedy) consistently voted to interpret civil-rights laws and previous Court decisions in the narrowest possible manner, without running the political risk of actually overturning them. The Court's emasculation of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 in the Patterson case, for example, completely misrepresented the aims of the Reconstruction Congress, which sought to secure for the former slaves the right to compete for advancement in the economic marketplace. The idea that the rights of free labour



applied only at the moment of signing a contract and then disappeared would certainly have surprised them. Justice Scalia insists that all consideration of race in legislation is barred by the Fourteenth Amendment—a position only slightly more extreme than that of his four colleagues—as if the framers of that Amendment viewed attempts to uplift a previously degraded group of Americans as equivalent to the discrimination of the past.

The overall result of these decisions is to allow businesses greater leeway in adopting employment practices that confine minority employees to the lowest paying jobs, and to invite endless litigation against affirmative-action programmes while placing strict limits on employment-discrimination suits. Each case, of course, possesses its own set of facts and distinct litigation history. But I am less concerned here with the legal technicalities than with what these decisions tell us about the Supreme Court majority's social and historical vision. If Justice Marshall perhaps exaggerated in charging that the Court now views racial discrimination as 'a phenomenon of the past', the decisions do suggest that racism is a fairly minor problem in modern American life. This is partly because of the majority's limited definition of racism itself as fundamentally a matter of prejudiced attitudes and overtly avowed discrimination by one individual against another. The practice of 'thinking by race', says Justice Scalia, is 'the source of the injustice' of the past—as if racism were simply a pattern of thought, and not deeply embedded in our society's economic and political institutions. The decisions explicitly disavow interest in what the Court calls 'societal racism' or, at best, claim that the law provides no remedy.

### Sophistries That Support Racism

To demonstrate discrimination, moreover, the Court asks plaintiffs to prove discriminatory intent. If employers do not publicly acknowledge a desire to exclude blacks (hardly a likely occurrence nowadays), even the grossest statistical disparities will not suffice. In the *Alaska* case, a totally segmented labour force as well as separate company housing for white and non-white employees, was not enough to establish a *prima facie* case of discrimination. The plaintiffs, the Court ruled, must show the discriminatory impact of each specific company policy, rather than the gross results of company actions. In *Richmond*, the fact that less than 1 per cent of city contracts had gone to black companies in the five years before the adoption of a set-aside programme proved nothing to the Court. Justice O'Connor, who wrote the majority opinion, suggested that lack of access to credit and professional training, and unfamiliarity with bidding procedures, might have limited the number of black construction contractors. It seems obvious that these 'nonracial factors', as she called them, themselves stemmed from past discrimination against blacks. But O'Connor speculated that blacks might well be 'disproportionately attracted to other industries than construction,' as if their distribution among the occupations has always been a matter of free choice.

I do not wish to suggest that the Justices in 1989 made a sudden volte-face; but rather, that the decisions accelerated a trend, visible since

the 1970s, for the Court to limit race-conscious remedies and demand evidence of purposeful discrimination. But what *is* new and shocking in comparing these recent decisions with those of only a few years ago, is the undisguised lack of sympathy for efforts to undo the effects of racism. The claims of white plaintiffs claiming 'reverse discrimination' receive an impassioned defence, while black victims of discrimination are treated with cool reserve. In one opinion, Justice Scalia suggested that affirmative-action programmes were motivated by a desire to 'even the score' against whites. O'Connor seems to think that the Richmond set-aside programme reflects nothing more than the use of political power by a black-majority city council to 'disadvantage a minority'; yet she refuses to consider that the absence of contracts to blacks in the past may reflect the previous domination of city government by whites. Even when it encounters blatant evidence of intentional discrimination, this Court fails to act. Unlike white tellers, Brenda Patterson was required to sweep the floor, subjected to racial epithets at work, and denied promotion, but the Court did not allow her to sue for damages.

Historians may well be struck by the ominous parallel between the reasoning of today's Court majority and that of Reconstruction's opponents over a century ago. O'Connor's statement that affirmative-action programmes 'may in fact promote notions of racial inferiority' by making it seem that blacks must rely on government assistance to advance themselves, echoes Andrew Johnson's warning that blacks wished to become wards of the state. The cry of 'reverse discrimination' reminds one of Johnson's veto of the Civil Rights Bill and the charge by other critics of Reconstruction that blacks were seeking 'class legislation'—the nineteenth century's term for special privilege. To which the most effective reply was that of black political leader William Whipper in the 1870s: 'The white race have had the benefit of class legislation ever since the foundation of our government.'

'History is irrefutable', wrote Justice Brennan in a stinging dissent from the Richmond decision. And the history of slavery and racism, embedded in the US Constitution by the founding fathers and sanctioned by the law for most of our history, cannot be erased by the sophistries of five Supreme Court Justices. Whether one believes in the jurisprudence of original intent, or in a vision of the Constitution informed by a broad understanding of the nation's past, an appreciation of history is essential for anyone attempting to confront the continuing racial dilemmas of US society. At its best, as Herbert Gutman constantly reminded us, the study of history is not simply a collection of facts, not a politically sanctioned listing of indisputable 'truths', but an ongoing means of collective self-discovery about the nature of American society. Unless the Supreme Court learns that history, it is not likely that we shall see what Frederick Douglass called for a century ago: a Court 'which shall be as true, as vigilant, as active, and exacting in maintaining laws enacted for the protection of human rights, as in other days was that Court for the destruction of human rights.'

## *Modern Capitalism and Its Shepherds*

Merchant capital, usurer capital, have been ubiquitous, but they have not by themselves brought about any decisive alteration of the world.\* It is industrial capital that has led to revolutionary change, and been the high-road to a scientific technology that has transformed agriculture as well as industry, society as well as economy. Industrial capitalism peeped out here and there before the nineteenth century, but on any considerable scale it seems to have been rejected like an alien graft, as something too unnatural to spread far. It has been a strange aberration on the human path, an abrupt mutation. Forces outside economic life were needed to establish it; only very complex, exceptional conditions could engender, or keep alive, the entrepreneurial spirit. There have always been much easier ways of making money than long-term industrial investment, the hard grind of running a factory. J.P. Morgan preferred to sit in a back parlour on Wall Street smoking cigars and playing solitaire, while money flowed towards him. The English, first to discover the industrial highroad, were soon

deserting it for similar parlours in the City, or looking for byways, short cuts and colonial Eldorados.

Wide variations within modern capitalism go with the fact that however much a novelty, it could only develop within moulds shaped by the past. A very important one was feudalism, of the exceptional west-European kind, whose nearest relative was Japanese. Capitalism and feudalism were not mutually exclusive in their modes of thinking or feeling. A dominant class's ideology spreads downward, as Marx and Engels saw early; and the instincts of any class may be, like its religion, surprisingly flexible and adaptable. Laura Stevenson shows how Londoners of Shakespeare's day could look back on their city's great figures not so much as great businessmen but as merchant-princes, animated by the same nobility of character as any feudal magnates of their time.<sup>1</sup> Three centuries later American workmen took the proud title 'Knights of Labour'.

In most cases the 'nation-state' was built much more by the state than by the nation or people, and to a great extent the same is true of its economy. It has been recognized that mercantilism was largely a translation into economic terms of the bureaucratic machinery set up by the 'absolute monarchies'. There must always have been mutual exchanges between the methods and techniques of the counting house or factory, and those of officialdom. When full-grown, businessmen plumed themselves on their rugged independence, and were all for *laissez faire*, as they still are in America; but this only meant that they wanted no interference from government, while they did want government to come to their help whenever there was occasion. Manchester wanted cotton-textile production in British India curtailed, in order to restrict competition. Free enterprise has always been ready to accept gifts, and not quite in the spirit of Pooh-Bah pocketing bribes in order to mortify his excessive family pride. Much more reluctantly, businessmen had to learn to submit at times to a degree of regulation by the state, for the sake of social peace.

### From Agrarian to Industrial Capitalism

After several false starts, chiefly in Italy and the Netherlands, it was in England that the new mode of production eventually got going, and then by the roundabout route of agrarian capitalism, nowhere else adopted over a whole country. It was capitalism of a very bastard sort, working within a framework nearly as 'feudal' as the serf-worked estates of eastern Europe. As there, state power was essential to get it going and police it, mainly in the period when a peasantry felt by its masters to have grown too independent, or *uppity*, was being degraded into a landless labour force available for hire. At that stage foreign mercenary troops might have to be brought in to crush resistance—a sidelight on the patriotism that Tudor Englishmen are always credited with. The system could then be comfortably run by the landlord who

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\* An earlier version of this paper was given in January 1989 in a seminar series organized by the History Department of the University of California at Los Angeles.

<sup>1</sup> L.C. Stevenson, *Praise and Paradox: Merchants and Craftsmen in Popular Elizabethan Literature*, Cambridge 1984, chapter 6.

rented his land to farmers, petty capitalists, and controlled the labourers on their behalf by his authority as Justice of the Peace, or seigneur with a government licence. 'His decree', a writer could still complain in the nineteenth century, 'so far as his labourers and cottage tenants are concerned, is as good as law.'<sup>2</sup> In other countries by then, governments were coming forward to help in setting up industry; in Britain this was less necessary because centuries of capitalist agriculture had familiarized the use of wage-labour, and inured the masses to discipline. At the same time, however, they had consolidated the power and influence of the landed aristocracy to a point that would make it a heavy clog on later industrial development.

Inseparable from the rise of modern states were their standing armies and navies. Whilst warfare was terribly destructive (but least so for England, which learned to fight all but its civil wars abroad), it could provide profitable opportunities for a good many. Northampton's staple trade of shoemaking got its start through orders for footwear for the parliamentary army in the civil war, and all hostilities for the next two centuries gave it a further fillip. Less of a mixed blessing than war was Europe's perpetual preparation for war. Armies generated ancillary activities from the building of forts to the sewing of uniforms. All these cost money, and the chief concern of the English political arena was deciding who should foot the bill. For a while, landowners found themselves paying more than they liked, but as statesmanship matured, things were better managed, and most of the paying was transferred to the lower classes—an arrangement doing credit to the Age of Reason (and admirably described of late by John Brewer).<sup>3</sup>

Many parallels can be seen, moreover, between the running of a regiment and that of a factory, each on hierarchical lines and each with an often dehumanizing tendency to reduce the human being to one machine among others. Armies set an example which could encourage the transition from scattered 'cottage industry' or 'putting out', to labour gathered under the factory roof. Popular phrases like 'captains of industry'—attributed to Thomas Carlyle—or 'Napoleon of finance' show how analogies between military and capitalist organization caught men's eyes. Their standard routines, their practice of living by timetables, their need of concerted effort, might qualify an individual to be either a useful officer or a useful manager, a sergeant or a foreman.

It may be a mistake to suppose that economic advances of any dramatic kind have been favoured by peaceful, humdrum conditions. In quiet times men collectively as well as individually have been prone to sink into dull repetition. Political upheavals, even disasters, have compelled them to improvise, to look for new ways. Modern wars have stimulated innovation, not so much through immediate military wants as by fostering an atmosphere of change and expectation.

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<sup>2</sup> G.C. Brodrick, 'The Law and Custom of Primogeniture', in J.W. Probyn, ed., *Systems of Land Tenure*, London 1881, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783*, London 1989.

Acceptance of industrialism required great shocks to the old order, disruptions painful to all societies in flux. What above all supplied Europe with the necessary earthquake was the span of years from 1789 to 1815, when a great revolution ushered in two decades of war. Neither political revolt nor battle by itself, but the two things working together, transformed Europe, or prepared its people's minds for the grand transformation.

The English State cannot be credited in any straightforward way with setting the Industrial Revolution in motion. On the contrary, mechanized industry once born could grow only slowly, partly at least because, as Gellner has observed, a rapid growth would have alarmed the reigning landlords.<sup>4</sup> In indirect ways, and in partnership with the mercantile interests, they had been creating many of the necessary conditions. This applies especially to the obsessive contest with France for West Indian islands and slave plantations. Most of the colonial products coming in were semi-luxury items for mass consumption: coffee, tea, sugar, tobacco—all bad for health but good for business. A proportion could be sold on the Continent and bring wealth into Britain, part of which might find its way into investment; but the chief service these goods rendered to industry must have been to induce labour to work harder and more regularly in order to be able to buy them, and to suffer hardships more patiently because such tranquillizers were available. When Napoleon tried to close the Continent to colonial goods, because Britain had got control of all the sources of supply, he was flouting one of the strongest appetites of the age. Consolations from the New World had more appeal than those, also on offer, in the next world.

### Discipline and Docility

Industrial revolution, the harnessing of machine power, was needed, above all perhaps, to teach the workman docility. In the opinion of many, English craftsmen had become in the eighteenth century too comfortably off, too expensive. It was assumed that Dutch exports prospered because Dutch labour was cheap. A pamphleteer of 1713 made the same complaint about France. 'The *French* did always out-do us in Price of Labour: Their common People live upon Roots, Cabbage, and other Herbage; four of their large Provinces subsist entirely upon Chestnuts.'<sup>5</sup> Ideal workers indeed, whom employers might hope to train to live entirely on cold water and fresh air. Travelling through France and Italy in 1766, Smollett contrasted the high living standard and high cost of English labour with foreign cheapness.<sup>6</sup> He saw no birds in southern France: they were all eaten. There is a convincing ring in the dictum of Andrew Ure, the philosopher of industry, that steam had to be called in to subdue the rebellious hand of labour. Some improvements in machinery were avowedly designed to overcome resistance to wage reductions. Like the peasants before them, the workers had to be brought to heel.

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<sup>4</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History*, London 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Anon, *General Maxims in Trade*, London 1713, p. 168.

<sup>6</sup> Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy* (1766), London 1907, p. 47.

Confrontation meant that mill owners would often have to look to the authorities for active support. This was forthcoming, on the general principle that 'the men are always wrong'; but a landlord government could not feel overeager to oblige the new mill-owning class which was drawing workers together in such multitudes. With no real police force on call before the 1830s, control might not be easy. Mill owners were seldom men of a stamp that fox-hunting squires could find congenial. Industry was making its home in remote valleys in the north of England and southern Scotland; the resulting division of Britain has become permanent. A good part of the workforce was still more alien. Labour was not very mobile, at least before the railways; most mill recruits moved only short distances. There was, however, a great exception: the reservoir of cheap labour represented by the Celtic regions of the British Isles—the same that supplied a large part of the manpower for the army which was building the empire. Poverty-stricken Irish peasants had learned to come to Britain for seasonal jobs on the land; to settle in the manufacturing towns was only another step. Their destitution was another sideways contribution to industrialization by the ruling class; rack-renting by Anglo-Irish landlords, and the bloody reconquest of a rebel Ireland in the late 1790s, were indeed indispensable components of the whole complex process. Lancashire was geographically well placed to draw labour from both Ireland and Wales; and the Glasgow area, similarly, from Ireland and the Highlands, crushed and disarmed after the 'forty-five', and always poor, overcrowded and landlord-ridden. But for England's possession of all these colonial regions within the British Isles, industry might have spread still more slowly, but also more evenly.

Between a stand-offish ruling class and a hostile working class, the pioneers of industry were uncomfortably situated. In the long run the relative failure of British industry to maintain its momentum must be ascribed, in part at least, to a lack of energetic pushing and prodding by the state. Capitalism has never been a fully self-acting, self-propelling force. Its greatest windfall during the early stages was the long-drawn period of war, from 1793 to 1815, against first Revolutionary and then Napoleonic France. This brought the older and newer propertied classes closer together, in the face of common enemies both abroad and at home. Patriotism could be invoked against opposition of any sort; labour unrest and political sedition could be bracketed, all the more because the struggle against Napoleon was economic as well as military, and industrial exports to new markets like South America had a vital part to play. With half a million men mobilized for the army and navy, there was armed force in plenty for repression. Men of all respectable classes were putting on uniform, joining the Yeomanry Corps that were forming everywhere. They were preparing to deal with Bonaparte if he made his threatened appearance, but standing ready also to put down 'Riots and Tumults'—as the 'Articles of Enrolment' of a corps raised at Doncaster pledged its members to do.

Capital accumulation was greatly speeded by the war profiteering of those years, even if only a minor part of the gains went into industry; they had an index in the ballooning of the National Debt—the indebtedness, that is, of taxpayers to those with plenty of money to lend the

government. Even labour conditions must have felt some relief from the removal of so much manpower from the market, though rising prices had an opposite effect. It might be possible to trace the Luddite or machine-wrecking outbreaks towards the end of the era to improvements in machinery intended to make up for shortage of hands. Analogies can be seen between it and the 'Eighty Years War' of Dutch independence from Spain, when Holland was being turned into a capitalist republic, with an influx of refugees from the southern Netherlands as a key factor.

After the return of peace, frictions developed between the two wings of property: mill owners were strong enough now to take the lead in a movement of the commercial middle classes at large against the power and privileges of the old order. They were demanding constitutional changes from which Toryism had been sheltered by its patriotic pose during the war. Both sides were satisfied by the compromise of 1832: parliamentary reform with the masses left out. On the economic front, Cobden and his fellow mill owners led the agitation against the Corn Laws which impeded food imports and kept landlord rents and costs of living high. They were not done away with until 1846.

Meanwhile a stream of official enquiries and reports on factory conditions—much admired by Marx—and legislation arising from them, were viewed by mill owners as a reprisal for their attacks on the ruling class. In part they may have been so, and certainly they imposed restraints on factory owners such as landowners did not dream of imposing on themselves. All the same, they were helpful, not harmful, to industrial peace and progress. Without some paternalistic regulation the workforce might have revolted, or withered away. With it, public opinion could come round to a more favourable view of industrial growth and the jobs it provided, as an antidote to social discontent instead of an irritant. In 1848 the first volume of Macaulay's *History* could draw a heart-warming picture of national prosperity.

### The Rise of Modern Nationalism

As in other countries later, railway-building and the rush to invest in it signalled the first full involvement of the propertied classes in industrial expansion; but the collapse late in 1845 of the 'railway mania' showed what lack of central planning could lead to. It might have been expected that the government would take more interest, if only from a strategic point of view. All railways were 'strategic' in the sense of being a potential addition to the forces of law and order. An engraving of 1835 shows a train on the newly opened Birmingham-Liverpool line, two of its waggons full of soldiers.<sup>7</sup> Wellington, however, the panjandrum of Tory wisdom, was too far behind the times to care about the iron horse; construction was left to private planning, and was consequently ill-planned and wasteful. Later in the century, ownership and control were drifting away from the industrial bourgeoisie into the hands of City men.

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<sup>7</sup> Engraving in Fenton House Museum, Hampstead, London.



When Chartism faded away after 1848 the 'millocracy' enjoyed a thirty-year spell of complacent confidence, summed up in the adage: 'What Manchester thinks today, England will think tomorrow.' Steam would solve all problems—all that was necessary was for its ministers, the manufacturers, to be given a free hand. So far were *laissez faire* attitudes pushed that they almost implied a withering away of the state, like the one Marx preached from his different pulpit. It may be that every class that is conscious of marching in the van of progress has a feeling that government has become irrelevant: it needs no artificial prop, and is sure that everyone must admire it and trust to its leadership. Even so, this was not the full, authentic bourgeois philosophy expounded by Bright and Cobden; it could not be, because capital and labour were too far apart, capital too isolated. Patriotic drum-banging was the easiest way to bring them together now and then, and in 1854–56 mill owners and workers joined hands, to the disgust of Bright and Cobden, in applauding the Crimean War, although what it was being fought for nobody could tell. In the next year, the Indian Mutiny set off an even louder outburst of hysteria. Whitehall policies were succeeding in drawing the country together, at the cost of denaturing both sides of the industrial society.

In another way too, the imperialist strategies of the past and present, by creating colonies around the globe, and the old colonies now the United States, made it easy—and steamships made it easier—for disgruntled or ambitious workers to emigrate to better homes. Britain was losing men and women of varied talents and skills, whose energy might have helped to keep its industry moving. Still more, it was losing much of the dynamic of struggle between labour and capital, which might have compelled the government to take a more active and stimulating hand in the economy.

Scots, further removed from the blighting air of Lombard Street, showed more readiness than Englishmen for the advance from light to heavy industry. Steamship-building gave plenty of opportunity; a new iron-clad navy had to be built; there was a lucrative world market for warships and armaments. But from the 1880s, there was stiffening competition from the newly industrializing countries, and Britain, in default of wholesome guidance from the state, proved unequal to the effort of modernizing its methods and holding on to its technological lead. Instead it chose the easier path of trailing behind the aristocracy—of the shires and the share-jobbers—whose eyes were increasingly fixed on the empire and its allied lures. More and more capital was being exported. British banks, unlike German banks, had little inclination to invest in manufacturing: for one reason, because so many merchant bankers were foreign immigrants with hardly any connection with Britain outside the square mile of the City. When Gladstone proposed Home Rule for Ireland in 1886 and most of the wealthier Liberals left the Party and joined the Tories, it was not only a political shift taking place, but an accompaniment of the social-economic shift from manufacture to finance.

Everywhere, industry brought fresh social tensions. To conservatives the factory proletariat looked outlandish and fearsome, a Caliban

monster, or (as was often said) like the barbarian invaders of Rome coming back to destroy civilization again. Yet it could not fail to be noticed that Britain, with more factories than any other countries, survived the fateful year 1848 with less disturbance than nearly all of them. The rebel workers of June in Paris were mostly artisans, flocking to the barricades from small workshops, not big mills. One cause of unrest in many regions was unemployment, and industrial expansion could be looked to as a means of lessening this.

Moreover, the French Revolution and Napoleon between them had set modern nationalism ablaze. There had been older forms of patriotism, not in Europe alone; but it may be true, as orthodox Marxism has said, that neither the modern version nor industrial capitalism could blossom without each entwining itself round the other. To be kept at the proper temperature, nationalism needed occasional wars, and nothing less could suffice to divert the fevers of 1848 into a more commendable channel. Louis Bonaparte's coup of December 1858, wrote Engels, looking back on it long after, 'secured for Europe the assurance of domestic tranquillity, in order to give it the blessing of a new era of wars.'<sup>8</sup> Sure enough, a series of European conflicts followed, with Bonaparte (now Napoleon III) leading the way, and Bismarck coming out on top. Their scrimmages made it very clear that without a modern industry no country could now be well prepared for fighting; it behoved governments therefore to make sure that industry flourished.

Quite apart from this, there was a feeling among the educated classes everywhere that without the up-to-date furnishings and style of living made possible by manufactures and advertised by the Crystal Palace, a country must be regarded as backward. Spain was looked down on by foreigners, and by travelled Spaniards, and sometimes dubbed 'the China of Europe'. This was not for want of 'strong government'. There was a conscript army quite big enough to keep the working class in what was called 'order', and there was no shortage of dictators, all of them from the army. There was also tariff protection, not entirely nullified by British possession of that grand smuggling depot, Gibraltar. But assets like these have never been enough by themselves. What was lacking was a government and civil service with some intelligent training, and a bourgeoisie eager to show what it could do. Liberal governments debauched their supporters, the moneyed middle classes, by selling off public lands at knockdown prices; the most energetic businessmen were foreigners, like the Britons who set up the first factory at Malaga.

Liberalism, the creed of the European bourgeoisie, was always full of inconsistencies, and often unstable under trial. To a great extent it was displaced by nationalism, at a time too when this was taking on a more aggressive character, and industry in most countries was closely tied to the state by tariffs, subsidies, government orders. In Britain the shift could be seen in the schism over Ireland, when so many

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<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Engels, Preface to 1895 edition of Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France* (1849-50).

Liberals became 'Liberal Unionists'. In Germany after the unification, most Liberals turned into 'National Liberals'. Except among peoples still struggling for independence, patriotism was quickly pre-empted by right-wing parties and interests; but changes in class attitudes were not all on one side. In Germany the bourgeoisie might undergo 'a certain process of feudalization',<sup>9</sup> but blue blood was more than ready to take a share of the profits piled up by 'chimney barons'.

### Militarism and Order

Underlying their new-found fraternity was the perennial need to keep the working class, badly infected now with socialism, under control, and for this purpose no one could be better relied upon than Bismarck and his victorious generals. The sword had become inseparable from bourgeois society, Karl Liebknecht, the German socialist, wrote. 'Capitalism and its mighty servant militarism by no means love each other', but each accepted the necessity of the other.<sup>10</sup> Liebknecht's book on the European military plague, which got him into prison in 1907 on a treason charge, showed very clearly how the armies and their propaganda served to bolster industrialism and see it safely through its difficult opening decades, by combatting socialism, helping to break strikes and so on, even though none of them overtly held political power in that epoch. One special need for their services was that industry was sometimes growing most quickly in national-minority regions, like Catalonia and Russian Poland, where labour discontent was compounded by nationalist feeling. Another was that capital and technology often had to be solicited from abroad; and foreign investors required, as they did in their colonies, firm maintenance of 'order'.

Between constitutional and economic progress, it has been pointed out, there might be very little correspondence. Tom Nairn observes that from 1870 to 1914 the Hapsburg empire had a much better growth rate than Britain.<sup>11</sup> Francis Joseph, its ruler for more than half a century, never showed himself in public except in uniform, as though to emphasize that this was an empire founded on conquest, and that its cosmopolitan regiments were the army of the Hapsburg dynasty. His ally William II, meeting the American special envoy Colonel House in 1914, on the brink of the war, was indignant at any thought of Germany's sacred *Militarismus* being tampered with. His middle-class subjects acquiesced, often with nervous qualms, in the archaic government they lived under, out of fear of socialism. Two crushing defeats in war were to be the penalty for kowtowing to Kaiser and Fuehrer.

The crucial part was played on the Continent by conscription. Formerly, liability to service had been selective; in the years before 1914 it became, in principle if not entirely in fact, universal. Army discipline, drilling, bullying, indoctrination, could be counted on to turn out not

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<sup>9</sup> H. Gollwitzer, *Europe in the Age of Imperialism 1880-1914*, London 1969, p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Liebknecht, *Militarism and Anti-Militarism* (trans. G. Lock), Cambridge 1973, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass. Britain and its Monarchy*, London 1988, pp. 251-2 (quoting David Good).

only obedient soldiers but docile workers; employers in Germany showed a distinct preference for men who had been through their spell of service. Conscription helped them to defy the menace of socialism. In France it was often made use of to end strikes, since workmen could at any time be declared soldiers, and brought under martial law. Altogether, industrial capitalism was developing oppositely from what the 'Manchester School' had hoped for, and taking on a dangerous slant towards authoritarian and sabre-rattling habits.

In France under the old monarchy the bourgeoisie had been accustomed to paternalistic treatment. The revolution it was jostled into—rather than leading—in 1789 left it floundering, fearful of the mass excitements that had been unchained, and ready to let Napoleon take charge. He took a firm line with the workers, and was never so popular with them as with the middle classes and the better-off peasants. He claimed (he was not a man to trouble himself about exact truth) to be the creator of French industry. He did foster it, with subsidies and prizes for manufacturers, whom he provided with a spacious European market under French occupation and free of British competition. Desire to overcome Britain by economic means intensified his ambition to dominate all Europe. Marx sometimes thought of Napoleon, with his excessive addiction to war, as the evil genius, not the good angel, of French industry. He left it in 1815 in a mood of depression, and for a quite long period growth was sluggish. Fear of the working class must have been one reason. Memories of recent revolution made the labour movement more political, and its revolts more violent, than in Britain, above all in 1848 and 1871.

The 1830 revolution ushered in the reign of a narrow financial oligarchy; 1848 brought the industrial bourgeoisie to the front, but in a very nervous mood after the workers' revolt in June. Napoleon III came to power by guaranteeing not only to protect property but to bring about social peace through economic expansion, as promised in the *Idées Napoléoniennes*, written in exile. He was a ruler of a new species, one who had seen the world and hobnobbed with men of ideas. 'Industry and trade', Marx wrote not long after the *coup d'état*, 'hence the business affairs of the middle class, are to prosper in hothouse fashion under the strong government.'<sup>2</sup> Like his uncle, Napoleon did give industry a push forward, this time with railway-building in the lead. Corruption was rampant, but bribery under some name or other has nearly always shown itself useful for lubricating relations between politics and economics. More serious, he had to balance and manoeuvre among contradictory pressures, his fumbling foreign policies led to one war after another—he could not be a Napoleon without proving that he could win battles—and the industrial boom ran down.

Defeat by Germany in 1870 brought to light a class antagonism still more extreme than in 1848. A massacre of Paris workers inaugurated the Third Republic, and its interventions in favour of capital were often highly arbitrary. Bourgeois power and capitalist profits were

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *Selected Works*, vol. 2, Moscow 1935, p. 424.

cushioned by national hatred of Germany; many workers rejected socialism as a German idea. Politicians preached a war of revenge, and it was obvious now, as it had not been after 1815, that for France to re-establish its position in Europe industrial strength was a necessity, especially with German production so expansive. Manufacturers wanting tariff protection had a simple case to argue. Beyond the Rhine the argument was readily duplicated.

### Germany's National Capitalism

Germany, despite the lateness of its national unification, had a background of orderly, regular life, a model of bureaucratic administration known as cameralism, pedantic but thorough and conscientious, very unlike the loafing amateurism of Whitehall. An old German principality was very much like a big landlord's estate; in Brandenburg, the original Hohenzollern territory, a considerable part of the land was the reigning family's property. In Brandenburg-Prussia the army and its separate treasury had been the nucleus of the state, and of something like a planned economy. Frederick the Great (1740-86) gave it a further dimension by fostering a commercial class; immigrants were invited to settle, and Huguenots flocking to Berlin made it for a time a town more French than German.

In 1815 the Rhineland provinces annexed by Revolutionary France were handed over to Prussia. They did not relish this; and some part of the industrial energy they displayed in the following years may be seen as an attempt to strike out on a line of their own, since under Prussian sway they could have no political life. All over Germany middle-class liberals wanted national unification, but not in the way it came about in the 1860s, through Prussian conquest. They then had to make the best of the Bismarckian dispensation. Capitalism here, by contrast with free-trade England, was *national* capitalism (at one time it would be known as 'National Socialism'). A late starter, with resentful neighbours, Germany had to industrialize without delay. Powerful cartels strengthened competitiveness in foreign markets; they could also augment business influence over a non-bourgeois government. There had been no call for this in *laissez faire* Britain, where industry remained small-scale and decentralized.

German business might have to fawn on the 'All-Highest' state and its Hohenzollern embodiment; in return the government well understood its duties towards capitalism, and more readily because like other royalties the Hohenzollerns had very large private investments of their own. Bismarck's alliance with Austria against Russia was a diplomatic revolution, but a more prophetic one was his training of the diplomatic service to push German sales in markets all over the world. Aristocratic English ambassadors thought this undignified; they, like others, had to follow suit, but they did so grudgingly. Class influences in Germany ran in both directions. Industrialists may have owed some of their energy, initiative, ruthlessness to the same qualities in the Prussian military caste which they were learning to admire; and its ambition of dominating Europe must have fed thoughts of a parallel economic sovereignty. All economic trends are conditioned by prevailing

collective moods, and the surging tide of German production was the outcome, as well as part of the cause, of a post-1870 atmosphere of triumphant self-assertion. Capitalist as well as philosopher or soldier could feel the glow of the Nietzschean Will-to-Power.

Prevailing moods could affect the working class as well. Industrialization created strains and imposed sacrifices, which could be muffled by the rhetoric of duty to the Fatherland. But there were some benefits too for the workers. As Marx and Engels saw, hitherto imports from Britain, undercutting handicraft products, had been spawning a 'latent proletariat'.<sup>3</sup> Now there were jobs, ill-paid as they might be, for millions who had had little choice but to go hungry or to emigrate. Bismarck, moreover, followed Napoleon III in appreciating the value of conciliation, and his programme of social insurance, meagre as it was (like Lloyd George's later imitation), could do something to blunt the socialist attack.

More insidiously, notions formed in the long feudal-absolutist era could find entry into working-class as well as middle-class minds. Industrial revolution was coming suddenly and swiftly, and men's thinking could not alter at the same pace. Habits of fidelity to a prince, looking up to a landowner, could make loyalty to an employer or an emperor a sort of instinct. It seems that many Germans from a working class exposed to socialist or communist teaching for two generations took quite seriously their compulsory army oath of loyalty to Hitler, and felt bound by it. Before 1914 Liebknecht was convinced that military men were planning for the great day when the workers would revolt and the army could shoot them down, and were hoping it would come soon, before socialism grew too strong.<sup>4</sup> But he pointed out that direct army meddling in industrial disputes was less frequent in Germany than in almost any other country.<sup>5</sup> It was not needed; their handling could be left to the police.

### Russia, The United States and Japan

In Russia, tsarist rule had begun in close association with the rich merchantry of Moscow; in the eighteenth century, mining and iron-working were state enterprises, often making use of serf labour. Nascent private industry received official encouragement. One cause of the breach between Alexander I and Napoleon in 1812 was the cotton mills wanting freedom to import their raw material, in defiance of the Continental System and its ban on colonial imports. In the modernizing era after the disasters of the Crimean War, when serfs were set free and the army was remodelled, the importance of railways and industry was obvious. They could not be developed without massive state support; it was often the government that raised loans abroad and funnelled capital into industrial enterprises. In that country, always simmering with discontents, where peasants left their villages to work in factories with their minds already infected, army and

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<sup>3</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845-46), London 1938, pp. 73-4.

<sup>4</sup> Liebknecht, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-6.

police vigilance was as necessary as capital to keep the wheels turning. But it could not make up for a social disharmony so extreme. Isaac Deutscher was one of those who have doubted whether industry could really have got going, on the lines it was following before 1914.<sup>16</sup> Management of foreign policy by Nicholas II was even more irresponsible than by his cousin William II. His private interest in a timber speculation on the Korean border was a contributory cause of the war of 1904-5 with Japan, leading to defeat and revolution.

The USA began life with a ready-made bourgeoisie and energetic money-making habits, no aristocracy to hide behind, and no need of government tutelage. Businessmen and politicians had close links, but different from the kind that existed in Europe. There was no social gulf between them, no incompatibility of values. Distance from Europe made diplomatic or military affairs as a rule very secondary; this and a federal constitution allowed the central government to remain in the background. Much official routine was left to the states, with whose pliable legislatures an enterprising man with dollars could usually reach agreement. Approaches to Washington were little required except for such purposes as obtaining tariff protection, or grants of public lands to railways and other undertakings, and for occasional adventures like the wars with Mexico in 1845 and Spain in 1898.

Southern slavery and cheap cotton lent aid to capitalist development from outside its own sphere. When the South wanted independence, the North, rather than lose its resources, embarked on the most serious armed conflict in American history: the Civil War of 1861-65. It gave a great stimulus to industrial growth and profits, and from then on the USA was launched on the pursuit of economic supremacy. This could be an object of national pride, as well as a promise of prosperity for all, and, like the plunge into imperialism in 1898, do something to reunite the war-torn country. An enormous territory awaiting occupation and development, or plundering, meant that industry did not need big orders for armaments. Nor was any heavy coercive apparatus needed to bridle the work force. Acute discontent would not easily gather, because Americans, like Europeans, were free to emigrate westwards. When an industrial proletariat appeared, much of it was foreign-born and fairly simply controlled by the expedient—adopted for instance at Buffalo—of putting police officers from one ethnic group in charge of districts where other communities lived. Often the task could be left to private enterprise, in the shape of Pinkerton men, a mercenary force armed with rifles and revolvers. In reserve was the national guard of each state, the middle classes in arms, ready at need to enforce a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Instead of the welfare strategy towards which Europe was taking tentative steps, America was moving towards the high-wage policy pioneered by Henry Ford; it broadened the home market and allowed it to absorb some of the surplus production that was causing uneasiness after 1900.

It is a tribute to the protean versatility of capitalism that in the decade

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<sup>16</sup> Isaac Deutscher, *The Unfinished Revolution in Russia 1917-1967*, London 1967, pp 10-12.

when America after the Civil War was starting its dizzy flight, Japan, its antithesis, was beginning to look in the same direction. Japan was to be the only grand success in the field outside Europe, and one on completely different lines. Marx speculated about whether Russia might make a leap from the 'primitive communism' of the village *mir* to modern socialism; Japan proved that there could be a jump from feudalism to capitalism. No doubt merchant-capital and town life had matured considerably during the two-and-a-half centuries of the Shogunate, the hegemony of the Tokugawa clan lords; so much so that by the middle of the nineteenth century its insistence on strict isolation was coming under question.

Gradual awakening from medieval dreams was suddenly hastened by the danger of the country being reduced to a colony of one of the Western empires. Whether it was a good thing for itself or the world that Japan was able to avoid this fate is a question that does not easily answer itself. What happened was the termination of the old feudal order, not in a revolutionary way but by a merging of elements ready for change within aristocracy and merchantry, and their adoption of a programme of equipping the country with modern technology, first and foremost for military purposes. Light industry could be left to merchants; heavy industry was initiated by the state and then entrusted to private hands, which may have been, as alleged, more competent.

So arduous an endeavour could not but impose painful ordeals and sacrifices. To mobilize national energies behind an autocratic though populist leadership, the old imperial dynasty, pushed into obscurity by the Shoguns, was brought out and brushed up. An artificial cult of Mikado-worship was grafted onto the old native Shinto religion, and everything the new regime did could be presented as the will of a divine emperor. Along with it, the Bushido code of samurai chivalry was broadened into a national creed, just when the samurai were being dispersed and, as a class, disappearing. Even in older times it could make a strong impression on plebeians, like the gentry code of honour in Europe. In the eighteenth-century play *Chushingura* (very popular ever since it was written) about a band of retainers pledged to revenge their dead lord, the heroes are fitted out with arms by a well-to-do businessman who admires their knightly dedication.<sup>7</sup> Now all Japanese could share it, and fancy themselves paladins. There were many in Europe too (Fabian socialists among them) in the years before 1914 who thought highly of Bushido as wholesome diet for a virile people. Obsessive veneration for the past found another expression in the institution of the Genro, or council of Elder Statesmen, repositories of the nation's deepest wisdom.

Thus Japan was setting out on the road to material progress with a mentality far more atavistic than any in the West, and with a heavy-handed police to safeguard the public against any germs of 'dangerous thoughts'. Progress and retrogression went together; Japan's economic success, combined (down to 1945) with abysmal moral failure, may suggest that ability to mass-produce commodities and sell them does

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<sup>7</sup> *Chushingura, the Treasury of Loyal Retainers*, trans. D. Keene, Columbia 1971



not rank among mankind's higher attributes, any more than capacity for mass destruction. Rationality could not be allowed to open its eyes among the masses, for whom a better life could be only a distant hope. Conscription was a new burden added to older ones. Peasants and factory workers, a good proportion of them women shut up in barracks, were under stern discipline, though with an admixture of feudal paternalism. Emigration, the European worker's escape route, was scarcely possible here. Imperialism, seizure of colonies, was an alternative to be taken up all the more urgently, along with cultivation of extreme militarism and racialism.

### The Arms Race

As 1914 approached, the capitalist world—Europe loudest—resounded with clamour about wicked foreigners. The workman had to be convinced that his real foe was not his employer but the enemy outside who was trying to ruin the country by unfair competition, and in the end by armed force. Britain would use its navy to blockade Germany; Germany would use its army to seize French and Belgian ports; and so on. Politicians, journalists, economists, bishops, swelled the chorus. Norman Angell wrote his famous book *The Great Illusion* in 1910 in an attempt to dispel this hysteria, but in vain. In some ways it was he himself who suffered from illusions. He was at bottom an old-fashioned Cobdenite, good at exposing economic fallacies, but taking capitalism for granted as the norm of human existence, and astonished—as Cobden and Bright had been—that it could not behave more rationally.

Apart from political motives, capitalism had discovered by now that the quickest way to the biggest profits was making and selling armaments, a more and more important sector of the European economy, and the one where bribery could be most useful. Sir Basil Zaharoff's career was only one lurid illustration of this. The arms race had some dividends for workers too. No more devoted workforce could be found than at the Krupps factory, where the Kaiser was fond of delivering histrionic speeches. Business and politics were converging realms. Any explosion like the delirium of 1914 would be caused not by either of them independently, but by the two combustibles getting too close.

In 1885 Engels predicted that when the next European upheaval came 'the saviour of society from the communist worker' would be the party of 'petty-bourgeois democracy'.<sup>28</sup> He might have been prophesying Nazism. In Italy and Germany after 1918 capitalism was in peril because the Italian army had been discredited, the German defeated and its monarchy swept away—and ten years later German industry was paralysed by the Slump. Mussolini and Hitler came to the rescue by organizing paramilitary movements of the lower-middle classes and putting them at the service of the state, which was thus enabled to continue its old role as an institution standing ostensibly—and in part really—outside the economic sphere. In France during the Slump years the right wing lacked sufficient unity and strength for a similar

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<sup>28</sup> Cited by G. Lichtheim, in *Marxism*, London 1964, p. 125 n. 2.

solution to be feasible; it found a substitute by welcoming Nazi occupation. Only a few turns of the screw were needed for the Japanese officer corps and ultra-nationalist societies to erect a native version of fascism and set about the conquest of China. By such reckless adventurism—akin to what was always the crying fault of their predecessors, the absolute monarchs—the dictators brought capitalism to the verge of another and final collapse. But by then another preserver was at hand, the USA.

With the American eagle spreading its wings over an exhausted brood in Europe and Japan, each of these tried one method or another of helping itself back to economic health and social conservatism. France had striking success with a form of *économie dirigée*, presided over by the government's technical experts. Britain's civil service has no equivalents, and a half-hearted experiment in state capitalism has given place to public properties of all sorts being sold off cheap, and a return to an antiquated kind of free enterprise. Enterprise has been shown chiefly in takeover bids and asset-stripping; a good part of manufacturing industry has used its freedom to lie down and die. There is a symbolic touch in the fact that 'undertaker', which formerly meant an entrepreneur, now in Britain means only what Americans call a mortician. As of old, the country is exporting capital instead of investing it at home. Lately Italy, once limping far behind in the industrial race, has claimed to have overtaken Britain. It seemed to Gramsci that fascism might at least do Italy some good by galvanizing the lagging economy, that it might turn out indeed to be a distorted form of bourgeois revolution.<sup>29</sup> At any rate Italy shared the experience of fascism with Germany and Japan, today the two most flourishing of all economies, —before 1945 the two most thoroughly militarized and disciplined, —in not much earlier days among the most rootedly feudal.

### Postwar Recovery

Neither Germany nor Japan, on the other hand, has based its recovery on arms production, as France and Britain, following the baleful example of their patron America, have to a great extent been trying to do. Here is a strange reversal of beliefs held until not many years before the Second World War—by Neville Chamberlain, for example, in spite of his Birmingham background—according to which armaments were an economic burden, and too many of them would mean inflation and unrest.<sup>30</sup> Today part of the game is to sell as many guns as possible abroad, with the welcome help of the quarrels that plague so much of the world. Nazi rearmament, coinciding with, if not causing, Germany's economic recovery in the 1930s, may have changed many minds; still more, the spectacle of the unbounded profiteering that American arms manufacturers have been licensed to indulge in. A prisoner of its own Cold War propaganda, the Pentagon was a captive customer. Easy profits for some may be enfeebling for the rest of an economy; realization has been dawning that preoccupation with

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<sup>29</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds., Quintin Hoare and G N Smith, London 1971, pp. xci, 118

<sup>30</sup> P. Addison, *The Road to 1945*, London 1975, p. 31.

weapons and their secretaries is liable to sterilize a good deal of technical inventiveness, as well as other resources. This, and the concomitant strategy of worldwide bases and garrisons, and lavish aid to allies or puppets, have overstrained the giant, and wiped out an enormous surplus of American investment abroad. Everyone has of course long since forgotten the recommendation of the Peace Conference of 1919—one of its few wise thoughts—that there should be no private manufacture of arms.

Japan's success since 1945 has been phenomenal: American economists agree with most others that somehow Japanese capitalism has devised a structure and conjured up a mentality that have lifted it above the American level, just as America and Germany reached a higher level than the British. This has been achieved without military rule, and without heavy reliance on arms production, but not without a good deal of *dirigisme*, state planning and guiding: Japan has not shared the delusive Anglo-American faith in the private enterprise of multinational corporations. At the outset, there was an American army of occupation to rule out any challenge from the Left; and Cold War exigencies have compelled the USA and its clients to admit a one-way flood of Japanese exports, to the undermining of their own manufactures.

Japan may have renounced war, under the shock of the 1945 bombs, but the emotional patterning of a war-like past has left deep traces. A company has a permanent following of employees, a substitute for the old feudal clan, who meet daily to sing a hymn in its praise. Young executives have been sent to army training schools for brief intensive courses in whatever can inculcate 'total submission to the group', 'mindless harmony of working life'.<sup>21</sup> There are civil schools too, where budding managers are tuned up to a proper pitch of resolution by gymnastics or contortions and wild chanting.<sup>22</sup> They may look like tribesmen performing war dances, but—presumably because their profession is at bottom a primitive affair—the self-hypnotizing works. How long it would take to turn these young men back into soldiers like their fathers may be another question. Clearly there is no longer need of policemen to curb deviant thinking. Former thought-control has been internalized: uniformity of belief is sucked in with every breath. Something of the same kind has been visible in the USA too; it may be called the capitalist conception of freedom. In a way it may be more mind-crippling than what went before in Japan. 'There will be freedom while there is life', a novelist wrote in his wartime diary; the authorities silenced people, but did not compel them to speak.<sup>23</sup>

In Europe bourgeois revolution petered out in failure, but the bourgeoisie was set at liberty to fulfil its material ambitions, under the aegis of an *ancien régime* whose fear of socialism it shared. In somewhat the same fashion, decolonization after 1945 meant that Third World countries often failed to win complete independence, but could achieve

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<sup>21</sup> *The Guardian*, 10 August 1974.

<sup>22</sup> From a television programme on Japan today, by A. Sampson, 'The Midas Touch', 27 January 1990.

<sup>23</sup> E. Seidensticker, *Kafka the Scribbler: The Life and Writings of Nagai Kafu, 1879–1959*, Stanford 1963, p. 157.

progress, if lopsidedly, through community of interests between their dominant groups and Western capital eager both to profit from cheap labour and to prevent any drifting into the Communist camp. This has been strikingly the case in Far Eastern areas where the World War left America's forces in occupation. Its preference, already formed by trial and error in the Philippines, was for indirect control, instead of annexation, through local 'leaders' and armies and police forces with American equipment and training.

### Free Enterprise and Dictatorship

What may be called 'military capitalism' had always played a part in the industrial evolution of Europe, and was now to show itself fully fledged in the most buoyant Third World economies, headed by South Korea. As in Japan under American occupation, in Korea and Taiwan there was a measure of agrarian reform, or social modernization, to clear the way for effective deployment of Western capital and technology. Their peoples had always had lively commercial traditions. Both had been Japanese colonies, habituated to the sternest discipline, sternest of all during the Second World War when some Koreans had been zealous collaborators. In Hong Kong and Singapore, business aptitudes frustrated in their native China were free to blossom in emigration. Korea had also, like Vietnam and unlike most Asian (especially Muslim) countries, a very old national consciousness, which could be harnessed now to economic development. For political reasons too, South Korea's rulers and their American backers had to keep ahead of North Korea, and those of Taiwan to compete with Communist China. The outcome proves that men and women can be got to work usefully under police rule; a fact that may have some relevance to debates about the productivity of serf labour in eastern Europe, or slave labour in the Americas, both sometimes made use of in industry and both lasting into the nineteenth century. Rousseau was not romancing when he wrote: 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.'

In South Korea power was seized in 1961 by Major-General Park. As Finer points out, he 'represented' no more than 3,600 soldiers, out of an army of 600,000, and the local American commander briefly declined to recognize him;<sup>24</sup> but Washington had only the blandest smiles, and he was free to play the despot until his murder in 1979. An understudy carried on; not until 1989 could mass protests, with a student vanguard and workers joining in, bring about some change. Away from the Far East too, and in Europe as well as other continents, America has been hand in glove with dictators, mostly military men. Among them have been some of the most vicious brutes known to history, from General Franco to General Pinochet. Britons love a lord, it used to be said, and American politicians love a dictator, so long as he has sound views on free enterprise. A uniform, with epaulettes and medals, lends him a reassuringly familiar look, whatever the colour of his skin. Armies have always felt like a separate estate of the realm, as in Germany before 1918 or Japan before 1945 they actually

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<sup>24</sup> S.E. Finer, *The Men on Horseback*, London 1962, p. 159.

were. In Latin America, with the Church no longer sound, and a medley of races and social strata only imperfectly transformed into modern classes, and often no identifiable leading class, it has come naturally to armies to usurp this position, and for property and Washington to rally round them.

Autocrats with any up-to-date pretensions have felt it incumbent on them to show themselves on the side of economic progress. In Pakistan, General Ayub made some headway, but one thing lacking was genuine agrarian reform, or defeudalizing of the countryside; another was a genuine bourgeoisie, most of the capitalists being unpopular newcomers clustered in Karachi. In Bolivia in the early 1970s Colonel Banzer's regime was 'hellbent on economic growth whatever the social cost', with policies designed 'primarily and almost exclusively to satisfy the needs and desires of private enterprise.'<sup>25</sup> Pinochet's coup was applauded by the Chilean middle classes, but he had to ensure American support and arms supplies by aligning himself with the monopolists, the interests closest to Washington and world capitalism. Military timetables were running ahead of local standard time. Brazil has been another demonstration that strong-arm rule and murder squads cannot by themselves guarantee progress. Its economic miracle consisted too much of grandiose public works; a high proportion of the bigger companies were state-controlled; a native capitalist class was not forming, because talented individuals were snapped up by the multinationals; a vast foreign debt was accumulating. The end came with inflation and economic chaos, and the ghosts of vanished forests.

An apologist for South Korea might argue that, economically, military rule, by preventing all strikes or labour disputes, can foster investment and accelerate production, and demand for labour will in time lead to improved wages—as in Japan; and that politically, industrial urban life will generate a public opinion which will in time render dictatorship superfluous, even if painful struggles are needed to dismantle it. Mature capitalism may find it, as in Western Europe today, not hard to come to terms with parliamentary democracy—of a suitably restrained sort. Even in Latin America army rule is out of fashion at present, though possibly not for long, since its basic causes have not been removed.

### Towards a Post-Entrepreneurial Epoch

A socialist is left to explain in what way his own methods of industry-building have been superior to the South Korean. They too have more often than not relied on compulsion; 'commandism', or bureaucratic dragooning, has been repudiated in principle but far too widely resorted to in practice. And they have been equally profligate in squandering or poisoning natural resources. Occasionally army men in power have set out to build socialism, instead of capitalism, like Siyad Barre in Somalia in the middle 1970s. He received a flow of Soviet arms and advisers, and could bid defiance to clerical obstruction, but he very soon turned away to what seemed the more facile

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Gott, in *The Guardian*, 30 May 1973.

option of starting a nationalist war for territory against Ethiopia. More lamentably, socialism in Eastern Europe, and in the USSR itself, has lost its creative momentum. It has at last been compelled to confess this, and, very reluctantly, to let its peoples breathe fresh air; many other commodities they are still waiting for. One way of accounting for this failure is the Tory contention that socialism goes against the grain, and *must* fail. A kinder one may be that coercion is all right for setting up an economy based on sordid greed, or what Hampson has lately called 'the politics of the pig trough',<sup>26</sup> but not for one that needs the vital spark of idealism. In other words: is socialism repugnant to human nature, or dictatorship repugnant to socialism?

We may be forced to look again at some older Marxian ideas, and wonder whether socialism can only really come about before it is felt to be necessary (that is, when capitalism has exhausted its historic mission of creating material plenty, and has nothing further to offer). There are already symptoms of Japan being ready to accompany or lead the West into a post-entrepreneurial epoch, and enjoy a rentier existence, placidly buying up Los Angeles and Vancouver and leaving production to the beginners' class, and to robots. A flourishing guided economy like Japan's may prove ideally suitable for translation into socialism, whereas hitherto socialism has too often meant the nationalizing of scarcity.

In any case, capitalism today, not socialism alone, faces many dilemmas which it is poorly equipped to think out. Politics and economics have become inextricably mixed. Today's chancellor of the exchequer is tomorrow's chairman of a finance company, with a doubled or trebled salary. It is hard to say at any moment whether the state is guiding capitalism, or capitalism leading the state by the nose. Neither has leisure or taste for long-term planning; both are reduced to hasty, improvised decisions, to get them out of one awkward corner into another—hand to mouth tactics with no more distant perspective than the next election or the balance sheet for the next shareholders' meeting. Questioners are referred to the 'market' for answers; the economy, like the Newtonian universe, is a self-regulating clock which will go for ever. But the voice of the market is that of the speculator—bull or bear—as the voices of the ancient oracles were those of their priests. And today all governments that have relied on armaments for jobs and profits are faced with a nightmare they never expected to encounter. The Cold War which has been the breath of their nostrils for so many years has suddenly lost credibility, and sweeping arms reductions have become inevitable. The shock must be stunning, worse than a thousand earthquakes. Meanwhile our corner of the universe is rapidly deteriorating; at this rate it will not be much longer inhabitable.

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<sup>26</sup> N. Hampson, in H.T. Mason and W. Doyle, eds., *The Impact of the French Revolution on European Consciousness*, Gloucester 1989, p. 198.

## The Idea of the Primitive: British Art and Anthropology 1918–1930

The idea of the primitive has long been a potent and highly influential current in British thought and history.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the period 1918–30 saw primitivism established as an important theme in writing on art and anthropology. Analysis of the concept may therefore usefully begin there—with a span of time seemingly unitary enough to justify a synchronic treatment. The war deeply affected the nature of the concept, in particular the perception of the existence of savagery beneath a civilized exterior, the definition of barbarism on racial grounds, and the construction of an image of the British working-class fighting man. It also ushered in a new economic and colonial era. At the end of the period, the Depression marked another economic phase characterized by intellectual radicalism. Between these two events many factors remained stable: economical and political debates, the retreat of the avant-garde, and attitudes to colonialism that to some extent defined views of the primitive.

To attempt to define the primitive in a priori fashion, before looking at how the concept was actually used, would be to arrive at a transcendent and ahistorical definition. We should rather look at the concept as it operated in the writing of this period.

The word 'primitive' is frequently used of artistic work produced by people in the following groups: the naive, the savage, the insane, the child, folk, medieval. 'Savage' art includes work from contemporary and prehistoric societies and ancient civilizations. 'Folk' art includes peasant and proletarian art of European countries. Writers often make simple comparisons between the areas, as these two observations by art critics show: 'Here is a case... of a child of twelve... being moved to produce art as fine, in essence, as that of Botticelli, Piero della Francesca, Giotto, and some other few examples of primitive inspiration.'<sup>2</sup> '[Le Douanier] Rousseau is the folk painter, and he has the aspiration of the peasant... The Gothic peasant does not lie far below the skin of the bourgeois.'<sup>3</sup> These comparisons are at once all-embracing and elusive. The child's work is like Botticelli's—in essence; Rousseau is actually a peasant—but only beneath a petit-bourgeois exterior. How do such comparisons work? What do the various aspects of the primitive have in common? Is it to do with the essence of the art, the character of the artist, or the quality of the execution? Often it is simply the soul of the artist. Given a similarity in the groups of souls, minds or natures, a similar art naturally and directly results. In primitive art the relation between conception and execution is supposed to be unproblematic and direct in a way that is not true of more civilized work.

Likewise, children's art and savage art are similar since they are both based on the incapacity associated with growing up: 'All children have passed through from the primitive achievements of the most primitive of the Ur-folk.'<sup>4</sup> This assumed identity between ontogenesis and phylogenesis is a commonplace of the psychology and anthropology of this period. The art of the insane was thought to be similar in this respect. Often the similarity is to do with simplicity, naivety or honesty, qualities that express themselves in the final product as much as in the artistic process: 'The carver of idols is, without doubt, the most scrupulous of realists. He works with almost the same delicious naivety as Rousseau, who before painting a full-length of the poet Alfred Jarry, carefully measured him with a pocket-rule, after the fashion of a tailor.'<sup>5</sup> When primitive art was discussed, there was generally an erosion of the usual distinctions made in art criticism. The relations between the soul of the artist and the essence

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Chris Green and Jill Lloyd for their help and criticism.

<sup>2</sup> J. B. Manson, 'The Drawings of Pamela Blanco', *The Studio*, vol. 77, 1919, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Gordon, *Modern French Painters*, London 1923, pp. 96, 98.

<sup>4</sup> A. S. Levetus, 'Prof. Friedrich Theuer's Drawing Class at the Hyrd Boy's Orphanage at Modling near Vienna', *The Studio*, vol. 95, 1928, p. 261. See also Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, London 1919, pp. 50, 56 for analogies between the child, the neurotic and the savage, p. 62 on the similarity of 'dreamers, children and savages' in attitudes to the dead.

<sup>5</sup> André Salmon, 'Negro Art', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 36, 1920, p. 166.



of the work, between the quality and type of the execution and their expression in the work, are taken to be unmediated and direct.

So we can begin to make some sense of the concept of the primitive as used in the 1920s as being centred on the capacities and characteristics of a certain type of mind. However, many attempts were made to split open the category, to divide off one or more of its facets or to challenge its coherence altogether, not least by positing the existence of an exclusive, true or essential primitive. So the anthropologist W.H.R. Rivers thought the concept should be restricted to the most primitive people (in the sense of being the lowest down on the 'evolutionary ladder') that we know of. These would be the closest we can get to the true primitive, the first people.<sup>6</sup>

### The Avant-Garde

More important is the dispute over whether to include in the definition members of the avant-garde who take the primitive as their subject or idiom. Much of this controversy was centred on Gauguin because of his primitive subject matter and assumed life style. Wyndham Lewis stated one side of the argument: 'Gauguin was not an artist-type. He was a savage type addicted to painting. He was in reality very like his sunny friends in the Marquesas Islands. He was in as limited way a savage as an American Negro. Such people are savages who go in for art for motives of vanity or of undisguised sex.'<sup>7</sup> Jan Gordon expressed the opposite view: 'I think he was too civilized. He was so civilized that he could regard this civilization as a fraud. Whereas to the savage it is a heaped marvel.'<sup>8</sup>

It was generally praise to identify some aspect of a modern, self-conscious artist with the primitive, but it was something else for the identification to be made complete. Thornton and Gordon thought Gauguin and Van Gogh were primitive and unbalanced, the latter so seriously that his work contained symbols showing a regression to the primitive life of the race.<sup>9</sup> C. Hercules Read went further, in characterizing much avant-garde work as a 'pathological return to the crude and rudimentary conditions of barbarism'.<sup>10</sup>

While only denigrators of the avant-garde made identifications of modern art with the primitive absolute, nevertheless equations between the categories of the primitive stated earlier were frequently made by all kinds of writers, even the more liberal anthropologists. Those who opposed these equations, like Lewis, and Fry's associate,

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<sup>6</sup> W.H.R. Rivers, 'The Unity of Anthropology', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 11, 1922.

<sup>7</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'The Caliph's Design. Architects! where is your Vortex?' (1919), in Walter Michel and C.J. Fox, eds., *Wyndham Lewis on Art. Collected Writings 1913-56*, London 1969.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon, *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Thornton and Ronald Gordon, 'Art in Relation to Life, I', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 39, 1921, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> C. Hercules Read, 'Primitive Art and its Modern Development', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. XLVIII, 1918.

Clive Bell, tended to do so not because they disagreed with the thinking behind them, but because they opposed the positive connotations that often accompanied them. Bell, for instance, airing his racist views, satirized the identifications commonly made: 'It was delightful for those who sat drinking their cocktails and listening to nigger-bands to be told that, besides being the jolliest people on earth, they were the most sensitive and critically gifted. They, along with the children and savages whom in so many ways they resembled, were the possessors of natural, uncorrupted taste.'<sup>11</sup>

It is difficult to make sense of the concept of the primitive by reference to features of the works of art themselves—which ranged from prehistoric cave paintings to the airy pieces of the child artist, Pamela Bianco; from Giotto to Melanesian carving; from the work of the Douanier Rousseau to traditional peasant costumes. It is more instructive to concentrate, as most of the writers of the period did, on the people instead of the products.

The primitives are people dominated by power: of the contemporary primitives, 'savages' lived under colonial administrators; the insane under the administration of the asylum; children under their parents; folk and naive artists are members of a lower class than those that appreciate their work. So Roch Grey wrote of Henri Rousseau: 'His art, though it sprang from the People, could never make an appeal to other than the loftiest and most sensitive intelligence.'<sup>12</sup> The French critic, Maurice Raynal, in a work translated into English, described French naives, underscoring their class credentials, their ticket to naivety, by way of their former trades: 'The *douanier* Rousseau has been followed by other artists: . . . the farmer Utrillo . . . , the *terassier* Bombois, Boyer the *marchand de frits*, . . . the chimney-sweep Emile Gody.'<sup>13</sup>

Of the primitives of the past, medieval artists were less artists than artisans—craftsmen doing a job. Prehistoric and ancient peoples were considered similar to modern savages: socially, racially and morally inferior. This was reflected in the organization of art histories, where 'savage' and prehistoric art were placed together, out of the chronological order otherwise strictly adhered to.<sup>14</sup>

Social relations, rather than features of works of art, determined what was called 'primitive' and what was not. These relations determined the attitude taken to the art of governed races abroad, governed classes at home, and governed individuals in the family.<sup>15</sup> It also determined the interpretation of history.

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<sup>11</sup> Clive Bell, *Sense in Art*, London 1923, p. 218.

<sup>12</sup> Introduction, *Paintings by Henri Rousseau 'Le Douanier'*, Lefevre Galleries, London, 1926.

<sup>13</sup> Maurice Raynal, *Modern French Painters*, trans. R. Roeder, London 1926, p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> For example Martin Conway, 'From Alpha to Omega' (review of *History of Art* by Joseph Pijoan), *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 50, 1927, pp. 160–61.

<sup>15</sup> See Vivian Osborne, 'The Sculpture of Katherine Maltwood', *The Studio*, vol. 87, 1923, pp. 197–9; and Stephen Gwynn, 'The Art of Miss W.M. Geddes', *The Studio*, vol. 84, 1922, pp. 208–13.

## The Association with Nature

Assertions of similarities or identification between animal and vegetable forms and primitive works of art were frequently made. When the comparison is with plants, growth is often the most important feature of the supposed similarity. 'Art . . . can be drawn out of each individual child; made to flourish in much the same way as a flower, starting from a seed that is properly taken care of, breaks through the earth and bursts into bloom.'<sup>16</sup> The flower is the passive object of our contemplation and aesthetic enjoyment. When primitive art is associated with animals, vitality and fertility are usually the bases of the comparison.<sup>17</sup> One of the most important anthropologists of this period, Bronislaw Malinowski, in criticizing James Frazer's 'vitalist' view of primitive religion, captured the general attitude: 'We are left with the impression that religion is teeming with the forces of savage life, with its young beauty and crudity, with its exuberance and strength so violent that it leads now and again to suicidal acts of self immolation.'<sup>18</sup> The analogy with vegetable growth explained complexity without consciousness. The analogy with the animal explained vitality and fertility as a matter of pure instinct. So the status of the art work is changed. Wyndham Lewis wrote of the Moroccan Kasbah that it 'is as much a work of nature as a hive or anti-city.'<sup>19</sup> These analogies allow the civilized observer to admire primitive art without extending this admiration to its creators.

As with art, so with life. The primitive is always seen in an unmediated relationship to nature. This idea is expressed in many paintings that show 'savages' in idealized settings, lacking the modern and colonial features that were certainly apparent. Those influenced by the aesthetician Wilhelm Worringer, however, including T.E. Hulme<sup>20</sup> and Herbert Read<sup>21</sup>, opposed any analogy between vitalism and primitivism. Most notably, Wyndham Lewis, criticizing most modern art, proposed a return to older values: 'Deadness is the first condition of art. The armoured hide of the hippopotamus, the shell of the tortoise, feathers and machinery, you may put in one camp; naked pulsing and moving of the soft insides of life . . . that goes in the other camp.'<sup>22</sup> He put this lifelessness into practice in painting his *Tyros*—beings that appear human but which are at once a form of brute nature and a display of complete exteriority.

<sup>16</sup> Anon., 'Studio Talk: Save the Children Fund Exhibition', *The Studio*, vol. 80, 1920, pp. 193-4. And of the child artist, Bianco: 'She has developed entirely in her own way, as a flower grows from bud to blossom, without the blighting influence of school of art education. [Her drawings . . .] These beautiful things, sweet and untrammelled as childhood, seem effortless creations. One sleeps in the night and morning, Lo! the rose has bloomed.' Preface, *Babies and Fairies: Drawings by Pamela Bianco*, 1919, Leicester Galleries, London.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Holbrook Jackson, 'Studio Talk: Belfast', *The Studio*, vol. 90, 1925, p. 260, on the animal 'vitality' of 'elemental folk'; Editorial: 'A Word for Caliban', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 40, 1922, p. 157, on the 'amazing prolificness' of 'native art'; Albert Rutherford, ed., *Jacob Epstein*, London 1923, p. 9, on the 'virility' of primitive art.

<sup>18</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, 'Magic, Science and Religion' (1925), in *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, London 1948, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, 'The Kasbahs of the Atlas' (1933), in Michel and Fox.

<sup>20</sup> T.E. Hulme, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, London 1924, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> W.B. Honey, 'Our Stained Glass', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 50, 1927.

<sup>22</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Terr*, London 1918, p. 303.

## The Unconscious

The critic Clive Bell described self-consciousness and the critical spirit as one of 'the last acquisitions of humanity'.<sup>23</sup> It was a central concept in differentiating the civilized and the primitive. The notion of the primitive unconscious operates at different levels. Firstly, primitive art is unconscious because the relationship between vision and representation is direct. For R.H. Wilenski, negro sculptures 'are the result of direct reactions to the naked human body', their creators being able to perceive their subject 'as though nobody had perceived it before'. In fact their vision was so direct that when modern sculptors looked at negro work, 'they felt as Ruskin felt when after days spent in drawing the facades of Venetian palaces he saw daguerro-types of those facades for the first time.'<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, there is a direct relationship between the primitive artist's sensibility and its expression: 'The work is . . . the direct expression of the sensibility of the mind, fresh and immediate, with no other thought than that of the joyous expression of the fancy which seems to bubble up irresistibly from the well-springs of its nature.'<sup>25</sup> This is partly a matter of the supposed lack of intellectual input in primitive art. Fry wrote of the perception and creation of mental images in the Bushmen: 'The retinal image passed into a clear memory picture with scarcely any intervening mental process.'<sup>26</sup> Because of this lack of intellectual input, many aspects of primitive art were thought to be involuntary. Fry wrote that if a Neolithic man tried to make an objective record of his sensations, his 'habits of thought intervened, and dictated to his hand orderly, lucid, but entirely non-naturalistic forms'.<sup>27</sup> Not only the type of the art (non-naturalistic) but its quality (orderly and lucid) is withdrawn from the person of the primitive artist and 'explained' by the fundamental nature of man. A consequence of this view is the idea that the primitive lacks any real appreciation of his work, and perhaps that its qualities are mere accidents.

Some writers thought that unconsciousness in primitives extended not just to certain stages of the creative process, but to their entire culture. W.H.R. Rivers actually equated conscious primitive cultural activity (such as dances and ceremonies) with the unconscious activities of the civilized. The savage had no more idea of the meaning of his culture than we do of our dreams.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Freud: 'There is no sense in asking savages to tell us the real reason for their prohibitions—the origin of taboo . . . they cannot answer, since their real reason must be "unconscious".'<sup>29</sup> The primitive, then, lies in remote places, in different times,

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<sup>23</sup> Clive Bell, *Civilisation: An Essay*, London 1928, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> R.H. Wilenski, *The Meaning of Modern Sculpture*, London 1932, pp. 141-2

<sup>25</sup> Manson, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Fry, *Vision and Design*, London 1920, p. 68

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> Carveth Read, 'Review of "Dreams and Primitive Culture" by W.H.R. Rivers', *Man*, vol. XIX, 1919, pp. 108-10

<sup>29</sup> Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p. 31. This work of 1913 was first published in Britain in 1919. It was widely discussed among anthropologists and was particularly important for Malinowski. See his *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, London 1927, preface and pt.

but also at the base of our 'civilized' minds, so discoveries about it can be made by introspection. Thornton and Gordon wrote that the artist 'whose door to the unconscious mind is wide open' can recover 'primitive mental material' consisting of 'half formed vague chaotic aspirations . . . shadowy memories and experiences of the race.'<sup>30</sup>

Because primitive art was thought to be created directly, dishonesty could find no place in it. Honesty may be reflected in the life of the artist or it may be a feature of the race. Since the primitive artist works in an essentially unconscious manner, honesty is less a virtue than an imperative. This is also the case with 'truth to materials', the respect of the artist for the medium used and the responsibility to use techniques appropriate to it—an issue widely discussed among modern sculptors at the time. As with honesty, the primitive artist's truth to material was thought to be due partly to modest ambition and intellectual capacity, partly to the strong ties of tradition. It was never a matter of conscious choice. The 'negro' sculptor 'was content in his work to emphasize the elementary facts that a head resembles a box, the trunk and limbs resemble cylinders, and to let his material shape his conception.'<sup>31</sup> The absolute distinction between primitive and civilized was maintained when modern artists decided to work within the limits of a single material or technique, for instance when Henry Moore concentrated on carving; for the civilized artist it was always a matter of choice, never an imperative.

Other conventions were supposed to bind the primitive artist. Many anthropologists saw people in primitive societies as entirely ruled by the conventions of religion or magic or by the social collective: 'In nearly all primitive races we find . . . that the mentality is stable, fixed and almost invariable, not only in its essential elements, but in the very context and even in the details of its representations.'<sup>32</sup> The essential conservatism of primitives was a truism in the thought of this period. The construction of a complete network of convention guiding the artist's every move made primitive creation seem effortless. Again, credit for conscious activity was removed from the artist, and the primitive art work became essentially a product of nature.

## Change

There was a view of savage society and art as essentially unchanging, as a passive object of our knowledge. One art critic described Russian peasants as 'primitive people, whose life and feeling are the same as that of thousands, of millions, before them, beside them and after them.'<sup>33</sup> If there is apparent change, it is a surface effect. For the novelist Edith Wharton, North African civilization was a matter of 'perpetual flux and immovable stability'.<sup>34</sup> In this view, any essential change is inexplicable.

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<sup>30</sup> Thornton and Gordon, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> W.G.C., 'Monthly Chronicle Negro Art', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 38, 1921, p. 130.

<sup>32</sup> Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, London 1926, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> Albert Dresden, 'Ernest Bariach', *The Studio*, vol. 92, 1926, p. 341.

<sup>34</sup> Edith Wharton, *In Morocco*, London 1920, p. 127.

When change was conceded to have taken place in primitive society it was usually seen in terms of evolutionary steps with long periods of stasis between progressions. This unilinear conception of human evolutionary development was applied by some to the interpretation of art, as well as to social and religious change. This permitted the ordering of peoples into a rigid hierarchy and provided an ideological justification for colonialism, since a 'civilized' administration could be seen as encouraging trends towards higher development, as parents do with their children.

However, the diffusionist theory of change was more influential in Britain, especially after the defection of W.H.R. Rivers from the evolutionist camp in 1911. On this view, all change in society takes place by influence, invasion, or immigration from outside. Inventions are rarely made twice, so the course of primitive history can be reconstructed by tracing different cultural elements back to their diverse sources. All change was a matter of 'grafting'.<sup>35</sup> Diffusionist theory claimed to provide a firm link between ancient civilizations—sometimes designated primitive—and modern savages. The theory had a racist dimension, particularly in its implicit reduction of civilization to a single source. The effect of diffusion was a kind of evolution, as 'superior' ideas, inventions and cultures were adopted or enforced on the inferior. For instance, we are told that all Eastern sculpture owes its 'being' to the 'fructifying influence' of Alexander's conquests.<sup>36</sup> Wharton went as far as to state that 'it is not in Morocco that the clue to Moroccan art is to be found.'<sup>37</sup>

### Form and Content

There were a few attempts to define the primitive by addressing the works of art directly. These tended to be fragmentary and contradictory. Wilenski believed that primitive sculpture had various non-aesthetic functions, but thought that ancient Egyptian sculpture's 'non-sculptural meanings seemed to be expressed by means of the formal meaning.'<sup>38</sup> This formal meaning he described as the animation of basic geometrical volumes, which made the work relevant to modern sculptors, especially to Moore.<sup>39</sup> Other writers, notably Clive Bell, believed that primitive art was essentially a matter of decoration: an

<sup>35</sup> Ancient South American civilizations provided problems for diffusionist theory. It seemed incredible that Mayan culture could have developed without outside influence, that it appears 'to spring full-blown from the earth' (Cyril G.E. Bunt, 'American Art in the Burlington Fine Arts Club', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 37, 1920, p. 40). The simplest answer was that there had in fact been influence. Fry thought that it had come from East Asia, while that most extreme of diffusionists, Eliot-Smith, thought he could see elephants in Maya carving, thus proving the link (Fry, 'American Archaeology', in *Vision and Design*, and W. Percival Yetts, 'Elephants and Maya Art', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 45, 1924, pp. 262-9). The development of the same complex weaving techniques in Europe and America made the problem particularly acute. See Bunt, 'Studies in Peruvian Textiles', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 32, 1918, pp. 109-12.

<sup>36</sup> A.G.B.R., 'Review of "Sculpture in Siam" by Alfred Salmony', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 48, 1926, p. 214.

<sup>37</sup> Wharton, p. 199.

<sup>38</sup> Wilenski, p. 127.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 135

art of the surface, incapable of profound depth. No coherent theory emerged from this view, except perhaps that primitive art was based on technical and utilitarian determinants. One of the few serious attempts to define primitive creation by its characteristics was Roger Fry's theory of conceptual notation, which stated that primitive art was dominated by the concepts of language.<sup>40</sup> The primitive image was a set of tokens containing information. So features corresponding to well-marked concepts in language (such as eyes, horns and tail in an animal) would be over-emphasized.<sup>41</sup> However, there was no attempt to explore concepts in different languages and to see whether representations corresponded to conceptual differences. Fry thought the acid test for his theory was that the greatest degree of conceptualization was found among 'the lowest of savages . . . the least civilizable . . . regarded by other native races in much the same way that we look upon negroes'.<sup>42</sup>

The idea of the importance of the sign in primitive life was a common one. Wyndham Lewis wrote: 'The peasant, or any person living under primitive conditions . . . is surrounded by signs, not things.'<sup>43</sup> For Rivers, the symbolization found in the dreams of the civilized occurred in the waking lives of savages.<sup>44</sup> Fry's theories were part of a broad current of opinion that saw primitive mentality not as more truthful than the civilized, but as more completely governed by mental concepts expressed in language. Although the object of the theories was the works of art themselves, in presenting evidence for them the focus shifted to extrinsic factors.

Primitive art was generally supposed to be reliant on an external and non-aesthetic function. One reason was the widely held idea that primitive peoples were completely dominated by utilitarian concerns. The celebrated anthropologist, Radcliffe-Brown, thought that his subjects had 'no interest in nature save in so far as it directly affects social life'.<sup>45</sup> Primitive art was supposed to fulfil various overlapping functions. One was the creation in the viewer's mind of an unconscious and impressionable state—which one writer compared to that created in a sleepless child counting sheep.<sup>46</sup> Another was the illustration of religious meaning, a feature often presented as an inescapable imperative. For most writers though, primitive art acted as a kind of magic. This was particularly true of interpretations of cave painting. Lewis's belief that all art was a product of magic was extreme, but it was nevertheless a development of the dominant opinion. Associated with this view that art was 'the civilized substitute for magic'<sup>47</sup> was the idea that primitive art was used in (generally unspecified) religious or magical ceremonies. For instance, Wilenski tells us that

<sup>40</sup> Fry, p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, pp. 66–7.

<sup>43</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'The Carnac and his Wife' (1927), *The Complete Wild Body*, Santa Barbara 1982, p. 102.

<sup>44</sup> Carveth Read, p. 109.

<sup>45</sup> A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders*, Cambridge 1922, p. 379.

<sup>46</sup> Bonamy Dobrée, 'Arabic Art in Egypt', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 36, 1920, p. 34.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis, 'The Dithyrambic Spectator' (1925), in Michel and Fox.

masks from Sierra Leone were used to terrify novices at the 'initiation into the mysteries of sex'.<sup>48</sup>

It was also thought that primitive art had a function in maintaining social cohesion. Dancing, for instance, encouraged discipline, physical coordination and social solidarity. In all cases, though, primitive peoples were ignorant of the 'real' use of their art. Aesthetic merit becomes a mere by-product of some utilitarian factor of which the artist may not even be aware. This attribution of specific functions to art was often pure speculation: debates about whether paleolithic cave paintings were magic aids to hunting, or were representations of the caveman's heaven, were based entirely on ignorance.<sup>49</sup> For us, it is the limited choice of options picked for discussion that is important. The primitive, as seen by the civilized, was caught up in a net of basic and unexamined assumptions which quite fully determined what could and what could not be seen and said.

### The Influence of Colonialism

The period after 1918 is often seen as a time of uncertainty for British colonialism. Woodrow Wilson's support for national self-determination, the refusal of parts of the Empire to provide Britain with military support in the Charnak incident, the problems in Ireland, and the massacre at Amritsar, fuelled a degree of misgiving about the political, if not the economic, benefits of the Empire. These factors should be seen in the context of the nation's economic decline<sup>50</sup> and the outright opposition to colonialism from communist labour at home and abroad. Colonialist views became the target for ridicule in some circles. Wyndham Lewis received a letter from A.J. Symons signed 'George R.I.'. It ended: 'P.S. Would Mr Lewis come to lecture the Indians on The Art of Being Ruled?'<sup>51</sup> They don't quite seem to understand their advantages at present. P.P.S. Would Mr Lewis care to be Viceroy?'<sup>52</sup>

Behind this kind of satire lay serious concern about the effects of the Empire on the people it governed. It is easy to overstate this side of the case however. The opposition view was in a minority, and should be set against the continuing tide of pro-imperialist propaganda produced by institutions (the Royal Empire Society, the British Empire League, the Victoria League), magazines (such as *The Round Table*), and the popular press, particularly the *Daily Express*.<sup>53</sup> The imperialist hero—the district officer or missionary—was still a popular stereotype. Travel literature contained a great deal of pro-imperialist writing, while in the art journal these views dominated criticism. One critic wrote of the Empire Exhibition at Wembley of 1924: 'It is said that the supreme significance of the British connection in India is to help modern India to recover the glories of her ancient culture. In the sphere of art, the sleeping Princess is opening her eyes to the golden touch of

<sup>48</sup> Wilenski, p. 138.

<sup>49</sup> Leonard Tristram, 'Paleolithic Cave Paintings', *Men*, vol. xxxii, 1923, p. 184.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Langan and Bill Schwarz, *Crisis in the British State 1880–1930*, Birmingham 1985.

<sup>51</sup> The title of a politically conservative book published by Lewis in 1926.

<sup>52</sup> c. 1928. From W.K. Rose, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, London 1963, p. 184.

<sup>53</sup> James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat*, London 1978, p. 313f.



British sympathy.<sup>54</sup> Some works of art acted directly as carriers of imperialist ideas. One of the most significant examples was Lutyens's city of New Delhi, an embodiment of Empire that carried imperialist slogans engraved into its walls: 'Liberty Does Not Descend To A People. A People Must Raise Themselves To Liberty. It Is A Blessing That Must Be Earned Before It Is Enjoyed.'<sup>55</sup>

The extent of the success of this view is reflected in social anthropology, which accepted colonialism, although it criticized the details of some policies. In the 1920s the discipline began to claim a role in advising colonial administrations. This change was perhaps a result of the threats and uncertainty to which colonialism was subject. Both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown believed that anthropology should be an instrument of colonial policy. It should 'provide a scientific basis for the control and education of native peoples'<sup>56</sup> and 'help the white man to govern, exploit and "improve" the native with less pernicious results to the latter'<sup>57</sup> Anthropologists were closely involved with governed peoples, but rarely analysed the economic activities of the Empire. In their view, if cultures were destroyed and injustices done, it was the result of incompetence or misunderstanding, never of deliberate policy based on fundamentally opposed interests.

The nature of these interests was recognized on a more abstract level. A virtually universal feature of the idea of the primitive, stressed by writers, was its vulnerability, and the likelihood, if not certainty, of its demise. The primitive and the civilized were of course seen as opposites: contact between them meant contamination and the destruction of the weaker. There was general agreement on the end result: 'a top hat clapped on to the head of a cannibal'<sup>58</sup> and 'the nemesis of the black man in a tall hat—neither fish, fowl, nor good red herring! . . . from the aesthetic point of view the savage deteriorates under the influence of Western civilization.'<sup>59</sup> Culturally, the primitive is vulnerable because he is unconscious: 'Once let the black or the peasant become acquainted with the showy utensils of industrialism . . . and, having no critical sense . . . he will be bowled over for a certainty. He will admire, he will imitate, he will be undone.'<sup>60</sup> The destruction was seen to operate on many levels, affecting every aspect of primitive life that could be the subject of civilized aesthetic enjoyment. The art of any individual child was seen to be under a similar threat as it grew up—it was generally assumed that a child's art would be better, within certain limits, at a younger age.<sup>61</sup> This feeling lent a sense of urgency to the accumulation of data and objects concerning the primitive, especially among

<sup>54</sup> O.C. Gangoly, 'Modern Indian Art in Wembley', *The Studio*, vol. 89, 1925, p. 145

<sup>55</sup> Morris, p. 375.

<sup>56</sup> A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'The Present Position of Anthropological Studies' (1931), *Methods in Social Anthropology*, London 1958, p. 93.

<sup>57</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*, London 1926, p. xi.

<sup>58</sup> Gordon, *ibid*

<sup>59</sup> Anon., 'The People of the Small Arrow', Drawings by Miss Pearl Binder', *The Studio*, vol. 95, 1928.

<sup>60</sup> Bell, p. 116.

<sup>61</sup> An opinion stated in, for instance, 'Studio Talk. Save the Children Fund Exhibition'.

anthropologists. The danger of disappearance was part of the justification for the intrusion of the scholar, the removal of artefacts, and the reduction of peoples to objects of knowledge.

The widespread sense of loss, the opposite of the dread of otherness and of absorption, was based on the supposed primitive in us all: the bourgeois yearning for innocence, for contact with nature and with instinct and the unconscious, for lost skills, for old school days, and against the barriers formed by the intellect. But this yearning for what James Frazer called 'the springtime of the world'<sup>62</sup> was always tempered by practicalities, and a realization of the advantages and the superiority of the civilized. It remained part of an insulated aesthetic experience.

## Race

The issue of race was of primary importance in the concept of the primitive. For some it was the determining factor: Wyndham Lewis described the 'negro' as 'racially a sort of Proletariat'.<sup>63</sup> Various kinds of racial description, all concerned with classification into types, tended to merge into each other. Ethnographic literature was the most concerned with gathering precise physical data and creating a structure of racial differences against which any individual could be definitively placed. Differences in the structure of the skull were considered particularly important. The information was gathered around a variety, or rather a progression, of racial types. One ethnologist, Myres, hoped that racial classification of character would proceed so far that you could 'refer a given individual to his racial type, if you met him in the dark'.<sup>64</sup> Anthropology was less concerned with the gathering of precise racial data, but racial descriptions of a more general kind were seen as important. These were similar to those in picturesque travel and art literature. Just as colour is crucial to the literature of the picturesque, so it is in racial description. The concern is not simply the classification but the instant recognition of racial types: 'The Jew dresses in *Black*, the Arab in *White*, and the Berber in intermediate colours (*Brown* predominates in the North, *Blue* in the South). The Negro dresses like the Berber peasant.'<sup>65</sup> Painting was of course the perfect medium for the illustration of these differences.

This kind of racial description was very widespread and completely accepted. Both those who praised primitive racial qualities, and the outspoken proponents of white supremacy and eugenics, lay outside this persistent and institutional racism, but both groups accepted its fundamental tenets. The system of racial classification extended to Europe where its primary determinant was class. In Britain

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<sup>62</sup> James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged edn, London 1922, p. 424.

<sup>63</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Paleface*, quoted by Geoffrey Wagner, *Wyndham Lewis*, London 1957, p. 45.

<sup>64</sup> J.L. Myres, 'Correlation of Mental and Physical Characteristics in Man', *Man*, vol. xxiii, 1923, p. 118.

<sup>65</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Filibusters in Barbary' (1932), *Journey into Barbary: Morocco Writings and Drawings*, Santa Barbara 1983, p. 45.

immediately following the war, the image of the proletarian male was generally favourable: the unchanging British soldier, descendant of the bowman of Agincourt, is supported by his 'silent pride of race'.<sup>66</sup> This did not last long. Industrial disputes, the threat of army revolt and police strike, and the militancy of the unemployed-workers movement quickly ended the honeymoon period. The ethnologists Bradbrooke and Parsons searched the Chilterns for 'dark folk in isolated hamlets'. They failed to find any, but their data led them to believe that the indigenous population of the hills was darker than the average in England, and 'that this darkness is due to the survival of a greater proportion of Neolithic or Mediterranean blood in the district'.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, an examination of skulls in London uncovered evidence of neolithic survivals in the East End.<sup>68</sup> If the peasant and the proletarian were designated primitive, the reason was at least partly their place in racial classification.<sup>69</sup>

Race was thought to determine character and morality as much as physical features.<sup>70</sup> Naturally, then, race is also a determinant of aesthetic sensibility. T.E. Hulme's recasting of Worringer's aesthetic categories was based upon racial difference.<sup>71</sup> Herbert Read wrote that due to their nomadic origins, 'the Semites . . . are not expressive at all in plastic modes . . . Relatively speaking, there is no Jewish art'.<sup>72</sup> British attitudes to the depiction of other races in art were clearly revealed in the extreme reactions to Epstein's sculpture. Epstein himself admitted that pieces like *Lydia* or *Daisy Dunn*, which were busts of black women, were 'purely traditional and European in technique',<sup>73</sup> but they were characterized as primitive by critics. Perhaps Europeans found the pieces objectionable precisely because they treated their black subjects as individuals in a genre generally reserved for portraiture. His sculptures *Night* and *Genesis* were described as 'Mongolian', while his statue of Christ came in for particularly heavy attack for not looking European enough. Epstein wrote of this reaction to *Night*: 'It apparently always strikes people as unpleasant and peculiar to portray a being so alien to the appearance of a Briton'.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>66</sup> 'The British Soldier'. An Exhibition of pictures by Eric H. Kunnington, preface by Robert Graves, Leicester Galleries, London, 1921.

<sup>67</sup> W. Bradbrooke and F.G. Parsons, 'The Anthropology of the Chiltern Hills', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. II, 1922.

<sup>68</sup> F.G. Parsons, 'On the Long Barrow Race and its Relationship to the Modern Inhabitants of London', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. II, 1921.

<sup>69</sup> Bolshevism was also associated with primitivism: Epstein's 'primitivist' work, *Rima*, was branded Bolshevik when it was publicly exhibited; R.R.T., 'Shorter Notices. "Rima"', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 47, 1925, p. 337; and A.R.A., letter, 'Rima', and the reply by R.R. Tatlock, *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 48, 1926, p. 54.

<sup>70</sup> Myres (ibid.) suggested an experiment in racial 'moral tone' by 'marooning, let us say, Robinson Crusoe on one island, and Ah Sin on another, and (after sufficient purgatory) exposing both to similar moral temptations, by floating ashore a negress, or a cask of whisky.' The suggestion may not be entirely serious, but the mentality it illustrates is real enough.

<sup>71</sup> Hulme, p. 88.

<sup>72</sup> Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art*, London 1931, p. 158.

<sup>73</sup> Jacob Epstein and Arnold L. Harkell, *The Sculptor Speaks. A Series of Conversations on Art*, London 1931, p. 94.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

## Sex

One of the most important features of the primitive was the view taken of its relationship to sexuality and morality. It was defined in an inverse relationship to civilized sexuality. Either primitive sexuality was natural and moral, and civilized sexuality was degenerate and immoral, or vice versa. The former view was put very effectively by the American anthropologist Margaret Mead in her 1928 study of Samoa.<sup>75</sup> Mead's view was that of a society free from the sexual guilt and moral constraints of the West: 'Familiarity with sex, and the recognition of a need to deal with sex as an art, have produced a scheme of personal relations in which there are no neurotic pictures, no frigidity, no impotence except as the temporary result of severe illness; and the capacity for intercourse only once a night is counted as senility.'<sup>76</sup> This attitude precluded our idea of romantic love, which was 'inextricably bound up with ideas of monogamy, exclusiveness, jealousy and undeviating fidelity'.<sup>77</sup> Malinowski's conception of social activity among young Melanesians as a 'happy, free, arcadian existence, devoted to amusement and the pursuit of pleasure'<sup>78</sup> has some points of similarity with Mead's descriptions. These views were shared by some artists, notably Eric Gill who thought that savages regarded god as 'the fount of love'.<sup>79</sup> Some of his engravings, such as *The Dancer* and *The Juice of my Pomegranates*, both of 1925, contain scenes of unrestrained sexuality in primitive or ancient settings.

Primitive sexuality was often seen to be free and uninhibited because it existed in a state of nature. For Wilenski, savage sculptors, unlike the degenerate Greeks, 'saw only sexual and not sensual meanings in the naked human body, and the expression of those meanings was not trammelled by outside prejudice or inhabited from within'.<sup>80</sup> Again, a perceived quality of primitive art is explained by the absence of an attribute of European art.

In Freud there is an almost complete identification of the sexual with the primitive: 'Primitive men and neurotics attach a high degree of valuation—in our eyes an over-valuation—to psychical acts. This attitude may plausibly be brought into relation with narcissism and regarded as an essential component of it. In primitive men the process of thinking is still to a great extent sexualized.'<sup>81</sup> Freud believed that the first act of culture, of cooperative action, was the rebellion of a group of youths, expelled from the 'primal horde' by a patriarch who was enforcing his exclusive access to the females. The youths killed and ate him. The origin of totemism was the expiatory meal which

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<sup>75</sup> Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Harmondsworth 1943. This work was taken seriously at the time, but it is now clear that Mead arrived at a view of Samoan sexual mores that is virtually a reverse image of reality. See Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa*, Harvard 1983.

<sup>76</sup> Mead, p. 124.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>78</sup> Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*, London 1929, p. 55.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph Thorp, *Eric Gill*, London 1929, p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> Wilenski, p. 144.

<sup>81</sup> Freud, p. 89.

commemorated the act.<sup>82</sup> This notion of the natural state was based on psychological concepts, particularly the Oedipus Complex, which had been deduced from sessions with European patients. This was the basis of Malinowski's criticism: 'It is easy to perceive that the primal horde has been equipped with all the bias, maladjustments and ill-temper of a middle-class European family, and let loose in a pre-historic jungle.'<sup>83</sup>

Freud's theories shared features with influential ideas about primitive 'group marriage'. The lowest primitive state was supposedly a kind of sexual communism, which gradually evolved through matriarchy into a patriarchal monogamy. As Malinowski put it: 'One school, and a very powerful school, believes in group marriage, that is, in a state when individual marriage was unknown and instead of that human beings were sexually united into group marriage—something very immoral, terribly prurient, in fact, so unthinkable it has never been clearly defined!'<sup>84</sup> Accounts of sexual communism are common. The idea of an evolution of sexuality and morality was deeply ingrained in thinking about the primitive. One of Freud's followers, Ernest Jones, approvingly described patriarchy as 'the taming of man'.<sup>85</sup> This view of the moral corruption of the primitive led to prudery regarding its artefacts. Wilenski tells us, after describing a piece of African sculpture at length, that he cannot reproduce it because 'the view which best displays its character is not suitable for a book designed for a mixed English-speaking audience'.<sup>86</sup> Salmon described the literal emasculation of certain pieces of African sculpture by collectors: fortunately, he wrote, this can be done without damaging the works, since the parts in question are 'accidental, not essential, to art'.<sup>87</sup>

The view of the immoral natural state contrasted with a civilized morality is structurally close to its opposite. The judgement may differ but the terms of description are the same. Given that the primitive is defined in terms of difference, any view of primitive sexuality may well be determined by the view taken of civilized sexuality and morals. The issue of sex was one of the central points about which the concept of primitivism operated. The debates about corruption and morality were linked with political and social concerns about the physical degeneracy of the nation, its fertility and population, which were given added urgency by wartime casualties. Venereal disease was seen as an agent of degeneracy, its incidence being an index of national immorality.<sup>88</sup> Sexual licence was an issue of racial efficiency as well as morality.<sup>89</sup> For some, primitive sexuality was a genetic, moral and racial threat which lay beneath the skin of our civilization.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 140ff.

<sup>83</sup> Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, p. 165.

<sup>84</sup> Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages*, p. xxxii.

<sup>85</sup> Ernest Jones, 'Mother Right and the Sexual Ignorance of Savages', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol. vi, 1925, p. 130.

<sup>86</sup> Wilenski, p. 141n.

<sup>87</sup> Salmon, *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Lucy Bland, "'Cleansing the Portals of Life": The venereal disease campaign in the early twentieth century', in Langan and Schwarz.

<sup>89</sup> Caroline Rowan, 'Child Welfare and the Working Class Family', in Langan and Schwarz, pp. 226–7.

## The Picturesque

Picturesque descriptions of primitive peoples spanned many types of writing, and formed the basis for huge numbers of representations in the visual arts. The character of the primitive is expressed entirely on the surface: primitive people are unknowing works of art, suitable subjects for artist and writer. The most common element of these descriptions is literally local colour. A description of a harem from Edith Wharton's book about Morocco is a typical and eloquent example of this genre: 'As the young things moved about us on soft hennaed feet, the light played on shifting beams of gold and silver, blue and violet and apple-green, all harmonized and bemisted by clouds of pink and sky-blue; and through the changing group capered a little black picaninny in a cafton of silver-shot purple with a sash of raspberry red.'<sup>90</sup> Colour is a surface phenomenon, a secondary sense-perception, a product of our minds as much as of light. To concentrate on colour was to concentrate on the surface and on the subjective: surface became essence.

Descriptions that concentrated on colour were found in art-historical,<sup>91</sup> literary and anthropological writing. Generally, the primitive is given an aesthetic value. Sometimes this attitude led to a curious confusion of people and art works, to a description that crossed seamlessly from one to the other: 'These Highland people in their cream and buff kilts woven from the wool of their goats, their check plaids over their shoulders, their curious horned headdresses and their thick black ropes wound round their ample waists, move across the pale green hollows of the upper margs, behind which again a touch of silver on the sharply pointed peaks represents the Himalayan snows. At work or at play, migrating from place to place, or beating furiously on their big kettle drums at the characteristic Gaddi festivals, the colouring of these big pictures is quiet and subdued.'<sup>92</sup> There was almost no opposition to this barrage of writing obsessed with colour and ornament.

The attitude of travellers, and the circumstances of strangers in 'primitive' countries, affected what they brought back in terms of knowledge and art. A common complaint was the overwhelming 'curiosity' of indigenous peoples, which made it impossible to proceed quietly with art or study. The painter, Ellis Silas, found that he could not work in the Trobriand villages due to the attentions of the inhabitants.<sup>93</sup> This perhaps determined the distance of the painter from his human subjects as they appear in his pictures—remote figures in natural settings. Another artist, working in Palestine, hired a 'boy' to keep the crowds at bay, and related stories of artists set on and assaulted by their subjects.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Wharton, p. 138

<sup>91</sup> Some of the colour descriptions used in art journals may be due to the prevalence of black and white illustrations. However, the descriptions are used when colour illustration occurs.

<sup>92</sup> Constance M. Villiers-Stuart, 'The Last of the Rajput Court Painters', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 48, 1926, p. 4

<sup>93</sup> Ellis Silas, 'Papuan Paintings', *The Studio*, vol. 91, 1926, pp. 38–43.

<sup>94</sup> M.K. Hughes, 'Impressions of Palestine', *The Studio*, vol. 73, 1918, p. 6.

'Primitives' often made difficult sitters. It was this, and the language barrier, which T.E. Lawrence thought had made Eric Kennington turn his Arab subjects from individuals into types.<sup>95</sup> Conditions for painters in India were described as 'sufficiently objectionable to outweigh ... the diversity of picturesque subjects'. Fast work or a good visual memory were needed to overcome 'the eternal heat, the almost overwhelming curiosity of native crowds and the reluctance of street characters for public posing'.<sup>96</sup> Mental constraints were just as powerful as physical ones. For Wharton in Morocco: 'All these many threads of the native life, woven of greed and lust, of fetishism and fear and blind hate of the stranger, form ... a thick network in which at times one's feet seem literally to stumble.'<sup>97</sup>

Preconceptions of a colourful, picturesque primitive life regularly led to disappointment. For Silas, 'the villager presented but few of the qualities that go to the making of a picture'.<sup>98</sup> While a few travellers claimed to have found the true 'gorgeous East' where all was colour, most brought back their picturesque visions from 'a land of mud and dust, of dogs and donkeys, fleas and flies ... above all a land of smells, all pervading and defiling high heaven'.

The picturesque primitive allowed interpretations to be made merely by the examination of signs inscribed on its surface. For Wharton, 'the bending of passages so characteristic a device of the Moroccan builder, is like an architectural expression of the torturous secret of the soul of the land.'<sup>99</sup> Art, literature and anthropological knowledge all make representations of the primitive, and in building up its picture they share certain characteristics. This was particularly true of the new social anthropology. Firstly, the representations were static. The idea of unchangeable primitive society governed the form of its representation. Radcliffe-Brown concentrated on 'salvaging' static forms from the changing colonial present.<sup>100</sup> In general, exclusive reliance on field-work data implied synchronic study. Secondly, the picture was limited or framed. Both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown studied island societies that could be seen as discrete entities. Thirdly, representations were made to reveal essences. Radcliffe-Brown hoped to discover the 'essential significance' of various customs;<sup>101</sup> Malinowski, the social rationale behind them. In the 1920s both allowed a preconceived and unexamined concept of the primitive to govern their work.<sup>102</sup> So knowledge of the primitive was built up just like a picture would be: static, limited and essential.

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<sup>95</sup> *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Arab Portraits by Eric H. Kennington*, preface, Leicester Galleries, London, 1921.

<sup>96</sup> L.M. Gander, 'W.S. Bagdatopoulos', *The Studio*, vol. 93, 1927, pp. 99-100.

<sup>97</sup> Wharton, p. 112.

<sup>98</sup> Silas, p. 38.

<sup>99</sup> Wharton, p. 31.

<sup>100</sup> Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, London 1969.

<sup>101</sup> Adam Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists. The Modern British School*, London 1983, p. 43.

<sup>102</sup> Both later admitted this by denying the coherence of the concept. Radcliffe-Brown called it 'a great obstacle to scientific thinking in anthropology' (*Method in Social Anthropology*, Chicago 1958, p. 80).

## Art as Knowledge

The scholar's study of the primitive was a matter of breaking down barriers, of intruding and penetrating. This applied even to sensitive and sympathetic studies of the 'savage'.<sup>203</sup> Painting and drawing could serve this intrusive role, like photography, acting as bearers of knowledge. So W. Langdon Kihn's detailed pictures of North American Indians, 'quite apart from their undoubted aesthetic quality, contain enough material to be of genuine help to scientists and ethnologists.'<sup>204</sup> The artist by introspection can distil the essence of a type, can divine the features of a racial psychology, without specialist knowledge.

Similarities in the format of artists' drawings of primitive people and ethnographical illustrations suggest a common concern with the description of racial type. Epstein's sculpture, *Girl from Senegal*, was described as being 'expressive of racial psychology'.<sup>205</sup> His works were often discussed in terms of the knowledge they conveyed and illustrated. Another artist, Alexander Iacovleff, who painted portraits of North Africans, attempted 'the translation into graphic form of the character of the various ethnic types which he encountered. This character is shown in physiognomy, in attitude, in gesture... he had endeavoured to penetrate analytically back to the permanent types of the various races.'<sup>206</sup> These pictures are 'ethnographic syntheses' which brought to the surface racial characteristics for examination, classification and judgement. Knowledge of this type is a product of power, and its objects are dominated by power. Children were used as the objects of experiments to classify their aesthetic sensibilities by age, class and education.<sup>207</sup>

The most important reason for examining the primitive was to arrive at self-knowledge, for the primitive was at once a part of 'our' origins, and a negative image of our present state. Fry regretted the destruction of the Mayan and Aztec civilizations, since 'they would have been for us the opposite point of our orbit; they would have given us a parallax from which we might have estimated the movements of... the social nature of man.'<sup>208</sup> It was the hope of the social anthropologists to produce universally applicable social laws. Their detailed field studies did not preclude comparisons between societies, although they did work against simplistic ones. Radcliffe-Brown, at least, saw himself as laying the groundwork for a new science that would have practical applications in social control.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Malinowski apologized for the absence of explicit photographs of sexual practices in his *The Sexual Life of Savages*, implying that he would have used them if they could have been obtained (p. xlviii).

<sup>204</sup> L. Richmond, Indian Portraits of W. Langdon Kihn, *The Studio*, vol. 90, 1925, p. 345.

<sup>205</sup> Albert Rutherston, ed., *Epstein*, London 1925, p. 26.

<sup>206</sup> M. Valotaur, 'Alexander Iacovleff', *The Studio*, vol. 92, 1926, p. 308.

<sup>207</sup> Margaret Bulley, 'An Experiment', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 35, 1919, 162-6; and 'The Child and Art: an Experiment', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 43, 1923, 179-84.

<sup>208</sup> Fry, 'American Archaeology', in *Vision and Design*, p. 155.

<sup>209</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'Method in Ethnology and Social Anthropology' (1923), in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society. Essays and Addresses*, London 1952, p. 18.



## Difference and Otherness

There was a general consensus that primitive people lacked intelligence and knowledge. For instance, Frazer opined that there was an association between savages and 'ignorant and dull-witted people everywhere'.<sup>100</sup> Others made this association a matter of definition: 'Any widespread gap in knowledge, any universal absence of information, any general imperfection of observation found among native races must, pending contrary evidence, be considered primitive.'<sup>101</sup> Only within this framework could the primitive's aesthetic sense be credited: 'The mind of the primitive was, of course, of very limited capacity, but, it was a human mind and, therefore, capable of artistic perception.'<sup>102</sup> Many refused to allow primitives even this status. Bell thought that 'negro' art was essentially inferior to the best of European art.<sup>103</sup> Very few writers denied this identification of the primitive with the simple. Those who gave primitive artists any credit, however unqualified, for their work should be seen against the mass of writing that denied it any merit whatsoever. For many writers, most notably the French anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl, there was an absolute difference between the way the primitive and the civilized minds worked. The savage was the negative image of the civilized, and all that was said of savagery was determined by this opposition.

Opposed to this idea of total difference were the social anthropologists who saw primitive mind and society as much like those of the civilized. Although they rarely challenged the use of the concept itself, their theories, especially those of Malinowski, were directed against dangerous generalizations about the primitive.<sup>104</sup> Malinowski also specifically attacked the theories of Lévy-Bruhl, criticizing the idea that 'primitive man has no sober moods at all, that he is hopelessly and completely immersed in a mystical frame of mind'.<sup>105</sup> Some of Radcliffe-Brown's writing had the same aim. This view fitted in with the contemporary formalist trend to deny all but technical differences between the arts of different periods, allowing aesthetic and stylistic influence to flow freely.<sup>106</sup> It was also informed by the notion, especially current after the war, that the primitive was inherent in us all. For some writers, it was inherent in our history: Frazer wrote that the civilized are like savages and owe much to their 'savage forefathers'.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps savagery is 'beneath our feet—and not very far beneath them—here in Europe at the present day, and it crops up on the surface in the heart of the Australian wilderness and wherever the advent of a higher civilization has not crushed it underground.'<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Frazer, p. 16.

<sup>101</sup> Bronisław Malinowski, 'Baloma, the Spirits of the Dead in the Trobriand Islands' (1916), in *Magic, Science and Religion*, p. 234.

<sup>102</sup> The Lay Figure, 'On the First Causes of Art', *The Studio*, vol. 86, 1923, p. 362.

<sup>103</sup> Bell, *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Kuper, p. 25f.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25.

<sup>106</sup> As suggested in 'Monthly Chronicle. Ancient Art', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 37, 1920, p. 209.

<sup>107</sup> Frazer, p. 161.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Perhaps it is inherent in our very nature. C. Hercules Read tells us of American prisoners of the Indians, freed from civilized convention, gladly turning savage.<sup>119</sup> We can even find the traces of the primitive in our bodies: Lévy-Bruhl described how the anthropologist Cushing, working among the Zufii Indians, learned their sign language and 'revived the primitive functions of his own hands living over again with them their experiences of prehistoric days'.<sup>120</sup> Along with this identification with the primitive, with the idea that it might be civilization, not savagery, that is vulnerable, went the fear of absorption. Lewis was particularly fearful of this: 'We have been . . . driven down into our primitive mental caves, of the cave-men of the new mental wilderness.'<sup>121</sup> This kind of attack was directed particularly against modernism.

Behind all the representations of the primitive, we should see their consumers: the aesthete, the connoisseur, the scholar. This type of 'civilized man' is the exact opposite of the primitive—reasonable, balanced and cultivated. The primitive was thought to pose a danger to the civilized. Many saw war as a manifestation of savagery; others thought revolution was the major threat to civilization. For the most paranoid, such as Lewis, the Other were in alliance. He wrote of D.H. Lawrence: '(1) The Unconscious; (2) The Feminine; (3) The Communist; those are the main principles of action of Mr Lawrence linked in a hot and piping trinity of rough-stuff primitivism and freudian hot-stuff.'<sup>122</sup> Lewis's associate, Roy Campbell, saw the attack as being centred on the head of the bourgeois family, the centre of intellect itself: 'Nearly all modern writers are out to humiliate the conscious white 'self' in favour of the savage, the woman, the child, or even the animal.'<sup>123</sup> The worst of it, as far as these proto-fascist writers were concerned, was that the threat was internal; the white man was 'going native' or being hypnotized by feelings of inferiority. They characterized such attitudes as 'nothing but a pathetic diffusive expansion towards some Otherness'.<sup>124</sup> This otherness was centred around people who could be seen as objects: as an unchanging part of nature, as unconscious, as part of a mechanistic utility. Details of power relations governed representations of the primitive quite precisely.

### Primitivism in Europe

While in other European countries the concept of the primitive shared many of the characteristics outlined above, there were nevertheless significant differences; these can only be hinted at here. France, a colonial nation and a victor in the war, was analogous to Britain in many respects. The cult of the primitive was if anything more marked, and major articles on primitive art were carried in journals like *Documents* and *Cahiers d'Art*. As we have seen, the

<sup>119</sup> C. Hercules Read, 'Primitive Art and its Modern Development'.

<sup>120</sup> Lévy-Bruhl, p. 161.

<sup>121</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'The Values of the Doctrine Behind "Subjective" Art' (1927), in Michel and Fox.

<sup>122</sup> Lewis, *Paleface*, p. 180.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis, 'Filibusters in Barbary', p. 47.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

views of major French critics like Maurice Raynal and André Salmon were published in Britain, and fitted in well with the general opinion there. Also, the work of Lévy-Bruhl in anthropology and Piaget in the study of children had much influence in positing a completely distinct primitive mind in both countries, and this is a mark of their similarity. However, France was different in having an art movement that was allied with Communism, and had arrived at this position through opposing imperialism. The organization by the Surrealists of an Anti-Colonial Exhibition in 1931 to counter the official show, was a sustained example of this attitude. The Surrealist view of the primitive was informed not only by Freud but by Lévy-Bruhl and Piaget, and shared some of the features of the liberal British one. In general the Surrealists avoided the use of the term 'primitive', and valued research into specific myths and religious practices: the point of such research being the light shed on the human psyche. Georges Bataille did his best to erode the distinction between the civilized and the primitive, in articles in *Documents*.

In Germany the situation was very different, since the cult of the primitive was largely a prewar phenomenon associated with Expressionism. This was a time of imperialist expansion for the German Empire, abruptly ended by defeat in the war. A view of the degeneracy of urban life and of a contrasting idyll of healthy outdoor activity was prevalent from the early years of this century. However, the idealist view of the primitive was subject to criticism even before the war. Many of the hopes of Expressionism were tied to those of political revolution, and when this failed the movement quickly became discredited. In the postwar period, far less attention was paid to the primitive, and where it does appear it is often in an ambiguous guise.<sup>25</sup> The journal of anthropological and archaeological art, *IPEK*, was set up in 1925, however, and had considerable influence in France and Germany.

The concept of primitivism is still current, and in the main is treated uncritically—as is shown, for instance, by the recent catalogue from the New York Museum of Modern Art on the subject.<sup>26</sup> Through Moore's interest in primitive sculpture, and Nicholson and Wood's discovery of the Cornish naive painter Alfred Wallis, the concept came to have great prominence in British art. It formed a kind of pole, or as Fry put it, a 'parallax', against which everything else was judged. The concept was closely linked with an idealistic notion of Nature. This has manifested itself not only in landscape work but also in abstract pieces, such as the sculpture of Barbara Hepworth, which takes its inspiration from natural forms, and its techniques (direct carving) from so-called primitive sources. However, looking back to the history of the concept in the 1920s, we might ask whether there is in fact anything in it that we want to keep for our own use today.

<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of the prewar period in Germany, see Jill Lloyd, 'Primitivism and Modernity: an Expressionist Dilemma', *German Art in the 20th Century. Painting and Sculpture 1905-1985*, Royal Academy, London.

<sup>26</sup> *Primitivism in the 20th Century. Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, New York Museum of Modern Art 1984.

## *International Competition in Historical Materialism*

Classical expositions of historical materialism have presented the process of transition from one social form to another as endogenously generated.<sup>1</sup> But Marxists have not been unaware of the facts of the diffusion of both technical and scientific knowledge, on the one hand, and political institutions and social structures on the other. Indeed, much of the emphasis of twentieth-century Marxism has been on such diffusion, whether in the form of imperialism and colonization, or in that of the 'structural assimilation' of various countries to the Soviet model as a result of political-military domination by the USSR or emulation of the model by modernizing elites in the 'Third World'. Exogenous factors were also in the minds of those Marxists who saw a struggle between rival social systems as assuming equal importance to (or even greater importance than) the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat. It is the contention of this article that by taking explicit account of the facts of inter-societal conflict *within* a revised historical materialism,<sup>2</sup> some of the unresolved difficulties of the classical model can be freshly and fruitfully addressed.

In an important article, Yuri I. Semenov has asked what it is that undergoes the sequence of progressive modes of production that Marx writes of in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.<sup>3</sup> He makes the point that no particular society—such as Roman or French society—has undergone the whole sequence. We can, of course, speak of French society undergoing the feudalism-to-capitalism transition. But there are some parts of the sequence that no society has gone through (the transition from ancient society to feudalism, for example). Rather than abandoning the unilinear story, as many have done, Semenov argues that the sequence applies to human history considered as a whole. He thereby adopts what Ernest Gellner has termed the 'torch-relay' theory of history, a view where particular cultures trailblaze for human development as a whole, only to pass on the task to others once the possibilities of a particular mode of development have been exhausted.<sup>4</sup> The Hegelian flavour of this is apparent: we have all the paraphernalia of world-historic cultures and non-historic nations.

### Evolution and Social Formations

It is not the purpose of this article to offer a detailed defence of Semenov, but rather to propose a similar 'torch-relay' theory of historical development. Historical materialism is an evolutionary theory. But although Marxism has often adopted modes of explanation that share features of Darwin's theory of biological evolution, this has not been so for the historical process as such. Let us recall what the elements of the Darwinian theory are. First, there is an environment constituted both by the physical environment and by other biological organisms. Second, there are organisms which survive and reproduce in that environment. Many members of a species may be produced, but only those best adapted to the rigours and scarcities of the environment

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank G.A. Cohen, Keith Graham, David Hirschmann and Brendan O'Leary, all of whom made helpful written comments on an earlier draft. Conversation with Peter Gowan was also very useful, as were the comments of my colleagues in the Department of Philosophy, University of Bristol, at a seminar presentation of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> 'Inter-societal' is a somewhat unhappy formulation here. In the modern period the relevant units are often co-extensive with the territory of political states, but this need not be the case.

<sup>3</sup> Yuri I. Semenov, 'The Theory of Socio-Economic Formations and World History', in Ernest Gellner, ed., *Soviet and Western Anthropology*, London 1980, pp. 29–58.

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Gellner, 'A Russian Marxist Philosophy of History', in *Soviet and Western Anthropology*, pp. 59–84. Marx anticipates the 'torch-relay' theory in his critique of Friedrich List: 'To hold that every nation goes through this development internally would be as absurd as the idea that every nation is bound to go through the political development of France or the philosophical development of Germany. What the nations have done as nations, they have done for human society; their whole value consists only in the fact that each single nation has accomplished for the benefit of other nations one of the main historical aspects . . . in the framework of which mankind has accomplished its development. And therefore after industry in England, politics in France and philosophy in Germany have been developed, they have been developed for the world, and their world-historic significance, as also that of these nations, has thereby come to an end.' 'Draft of an Article on Friedrich List's Book *Das nationale System der politischen Oekonomie*' (March 1845), *MECW*, vol. 4, London 1975, p. 281. This text is discussed in chapter 3 of Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx Versus Friedrich List*, Oxford 1988, and in Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, Cambridge 1985, p. 305.

will survive. Genetic mutation gives rise to variation within a given population. An organism may become well-adapted to exploit a particular 'niche'; it may develop sophisticated defences against predators; and so on. Of course the environment is not a static one, both because the physical environment is subject to change and because other species are changing.

Other evolutionary theories share this structure. For example, it is possible to construct a theory of the firm on quasi-Darwinian lines.<sup>5</sup> Firms face an environment constituted both by their competitors and by physical, geopolitical and other circumstances. They have no way of knowing in advance what the optimal structures and decision mechanisms would be, so they adopt rules of thumb (they guess, rely on habit, management folklore, and so forth). Firms that adopt sub-optimal procedures fail, and the routines embraced by successful firms spread through the population. But of course the environment faced by firms is constantly changing, and emulation of yesterday's optimal rules may spell disaster tomorrow. In this arena, combinations of chance and choice combine to impose both a pattern over time and rough adaptation of organisms to the environment they face.

This paper aims to extend this explanatory structure to the evolution of social systems.<sup>6</sup> If Marx is right, the most appropriate way to classify societies from a historical perspective is according to their social structure as given by the pattern of effective control over both human and non-human productive assets (labour-power, technical and scientific knowledge, physical plant and machinery, and so forth). At different levels of development of the material productive forces, different social structures are appropriate for their further development. Marxism asserts both an autonomous tendency for human productive power to increase, and the explanatory primacy of the productive forces over the social relations of production, so that when a social structure is no longer an appropriate developmental shell it will be replaced by another, better, one. Social structures are bound together by a political and legal superstructure. As human productive power

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<sup>5</sup> See Richard R. Nelson and Sidney G. Winter, *An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*, Cambridge, Mass 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Although most critics have picked up on Semenov's Hegelianism, the Darwinian aspect of his thought should not be neglected. It emerges in the following account of his theory of the emergence of primitive communism. Semenov begins prehistory not with an egalitarian communalism, but with a variety of pre-human groups, some of which are prone to domination and exploitation. 'The advantage will go to those bands which impose equal access to meat on their own members, thus liberating the productive talents of tool makers, who otherwise would not have survived under the pre-social paleolithic *anarchic regime*. Egalitarian communistic bands will benefit from the services of tool-makers in their own midst, and eventually replace domination-prone inequalitarian bands, who snatch the meat from innovative tool-inventors, with eventually fatal consequences for themselves as well as the hapless tool-makers.' Ernest Gellner, 'How Did Mankind Acquire Its Essence', in his *State and Society in Soviet Thought*, Oxford 1988, p. 30. Such a theory sits very harmoniously with the general perspective advocated here, although I am not competent to assess its truth. Semenov's Darwinianism is hinted at by Brendan O'Leary in his *The Asiatic Mode of Production*, Oxford 1989, p. 224. For another attempt to complete historical materialism with a selectionist mechanism, see John Torrance, 'Reproduction and Development: a Case for a "Darwinian" Mechanism in Marx's Theory of History', *Political Studies*, 33, 1985, pp. 382-98.

increases, social forms succeed one another until the advent of a non-class society in the shape of communism.<sup>7</sup>

Historical materialism in this form has faced many criticisms both from anti-Marxists and from within the Marxist 'tradition'. I do not intend to address all the problems, but rather to concentrate on the following attacks: (1) G.A. Cohen, in his influential reconstruction of historical materialism, established that the central claims of the materialist conception of history were unrevisably functional in form. Many critics, and most notably Jon Elster, have argued that this gives us good grounds for rejecting the Marxist theory of history, since functional explanation is usually inadmissible in social science, and since Cohen cannot point to any plausible mechanism linking the beneficial consequences of social structure or legal and political superstructures to the causes of their emergence.<sup>8</sup> (2) Many critics have sought to question the position of the productive forces as the 'motor of history', and have instead asserted a rival Marxist interpretation that makes class struggle the driving force of the historical process. (3) Much ink has been spilt on the question of how to interpret Marx's claim that the relations of production eventually act as a brake on the development of the productive forces and that this 'fettering' initiates an 'epoch of social revolution'.

The 'theory' to be proposed here is, in essence, as follows. Particular societies exist in an environment that is both physical (geography, natural resources, and so on) and geopolitical (neighbouring tribes for some, rival superpowers for others). Unfortunately, the policy of peaceful co-existence sometimes endorsed by Soviet leaders has not been widely followed in human history. Countries and cultures have engaged in both economic competition of various kinds and in military conflict.<sup>9</sup> In all these forms of conflict and competition, possession of a higher level of technological development increases the *chance* that a given culture or state will survive. (I put things in these probabilistic terms because I want to insure against counterexamples where a culture with a relatively advanced level of the productive forces fails because of natural disasters, incompetent generals, and so forth.) Cultures may adopt social structures (and indeed legal and political superstructures) for all sorts of reasons. The proximate cause may be religious or political, for example. But those countries or cultures that fail to select structures conducive to the development of the productive forces will either be eliminated (or assimilated) by their rivals, or

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<sup>7</sup> The understanding of historical materialism here is derived from the work of G.A. Cohen in his *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Oxford 1978, and his more recent *History, Labour and Freedom*, Oxford 1988.

<sup>8</sup> In his essay 'Further Thoughts on Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory', in John Roemer ed., *Analytical Marxism*, Cambridge 1986, Elster hedges his bets somewhat, describing the demand for a full feedback loop as 'excessively purist', but stating, 'I remain convinced . . . that for practical purposes it is the only viable research strategy' (p. 206).

<sup>9</sup> If we are to assign a significant role to military power in the diffusion of technological progress, it is not clear that we are remaining within the bounds of historical materialism, as G.A. Cohen points out in *History, Labour and Freedom*, p. 29. At the very least we need some theory that systematically reduces the military dimension to that of economic development.

will undergo a crisis that will force them to select anew their basic structures. In either case, the unsuccessful, if they survive, will tend to adopt structures resembling those of their successful rivals. A pattern will emerge in history, as structures conducive to the development of the productive forces at a particular point of their development are diffused. Needless to say, those cultures for whom a type of structure is especially successful will not be thrown into crisis and will avoid structural change. In the vicinity, however, there may be societies which are unable to generate the same success from that type of structure. Such states may sometimes select a better structure (from the developmental point of view) than the dominant culture possesses, and, by making a quantum leap in productive development, may themselves become the dominant global or regional power. The new structure will in turn be diffused by emulation or conquest.

### Functional Explanation

One of the most influential critiques of Cohen's reconstruction of historical materialism has been Jon Elster's.<sup>10</sup> Elster distinguishes among three modes of explanation: causal, functional and intentional.<sup>11</sup> Causal explanation is most appropriate in explaining events in the physical world. Although causal explanation may be philosophically problematic, we can assume that it is not in this context. An everyday example of causal explanation would be: 'The egg smashed because it was dropped on the floor.' Intentional explanation refers to intentions of agents—that is, to their wants, desires, their reasons for acting—and Elster thinks that it is the form of explanation most appropriate to the social sciences. A well-known (though possibly unsuccessful) example is Marx's explanation of the falling rate of profit as a consequence of the profit-seeking behaviour of individual capitalists. Functional explanation explains some phenomenon in terms of its beneficial consequences (or, to be more precise, in terms of its disposition to have beneficial consequences). (We need not be committed to the view that functional explanation is a special form of explanation irreducible to causal explanation.)

Elster accepts the viability of functional explanation in biology because an explanation like 'Giraffes have long necks to reach the leaves at the top of the trees' can be underpinned by the mechanisms of random mutation and natural selection. There is a feedback loop that selects in favour of those mutations that would tend to have beneficial consequences for the organism. But, as Elster is right to emphasize, most of the functional explanations advanced in sociology have not had this underpinning. If an anthropologist tells us 'The Hopi perform the rain-dance because rain-dancing reinforces social solidarity', but the rain-dancers assert that they dance in order to bring rain, we are entitled to demand evidence of a mechanism that makes the socially

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, ch. 5; review of G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, in *Political Studies*, 28, 1980, pp. 121–8; 'Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory', *Theory and Society*, 11, 1982, pp. 483–96. Cohen's responses are included in his *History, Labour and Freedom*.

<sup>11</sup> See especially, John Elster, *Explaining Technical Change*, Cambridge 1983.



beneficial consequence of the rain-dance part of the explanation of its performance.<sup>12</sup>

One response to Elster is to argue, as Cohen does, that one may be justified in asserting the functional explanation even in ignorance of the underlying mechanism, where a suitable pattern has become established.<sup>13</sup> Thus, functional adaptation in nature is so widespread that functional explanation of biological phenomena was justifiable before the elaboration of the mechanism proposed by Darwin. This article pursues a different strategy, that of suggesting a possible feedback mechanism. Social structures exist in an environment partly constituted by other social structures. Those social structures that fail to provide a favourable climate for the development of the productive forces gradually disappear, to be replaced within the population of social structures by those that do tend to have this beneficial consequence.

### Class Struggle

A second main line of criticism is advanced in the work of Georg Lukács, and has been argued recently by Robert Brenner and Ellen Meiksins Wood.<sup>14</sup> This denies the 'primacy thesis', which asserts the explanatory primacy of the forces over the relations of production, and asserts that the 'classical' theory's emphasis on the growth of human productive power is an unwarranted extrapolation from the experience of capitalism. It is not the material productive forces that are the 'motor of history', but rather the class struggle. As John Roemer has paraphrased this view: 'It is not the level of development of the productive forces that determines the economic structure, but class power which determines property relations, which in turn determine the speed of development of the productive forces.'<sup>15</sup> The traditional view of historical materialism, which sees the process of change as endogenous to a social formation, is either embarrassed by this critique or forced to challenge the veracity of the alleged facts. But the view proposed here can take on board the claims made for the priority

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<sup>12</sup> If the reason the rain-dance was performed was because the participants were aware of the beneficial consequences it would have for social solidarity, then Elster would disallow this as a functional explanation but allow it as intentional. But there may be good reasons for sometimes characterizing an explanation as functional even though the intentions of the agents play this crucial role. For example, when capitalist firms select particular routines, they do so with a view to the beneficial consequences. But although the selection of routines *ex ante* is intentionally explained, the eradication of routines that are suboptimal is done without regard to the method of selection. A good set of routines is a good set of routines whether selected *ex ante* by rational decision procedures or by Ouija board.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, his 'Reply to Elster on "Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory"', *Theory and Society*, 11, 1982, especially the remarks on pp. 490-1. See also *History, Labour and Freedom*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>14</sup> I do not intend to argue that their lines of argument are exactly the same. See Georg Lukács, review of N. Bukharin, *Historical Materialism*, in Georg Lukács, *Tactics and Ethics: Political Writings 1919-1929*, London 1972, pp. 134-42; Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'The Separation of the Economic and Political in Capitalism', *NLR* 127, May-June 1981, pp. 66-95; Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'Marxism and the Course of History', *NLR* 147, September-October 1984, pp. 95-108; Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Preindustrial Europe', in T.H. Ashton and C.H.E. Phillips, eds., *The Brenner Debate*, Cambridge 1986.

<sup>15</sup> John Roemer, *Free to Lose*, London 1988, p. 122.

of the relations over the forces of production within particular social formations—such as France in the early-modern period—without indignity. For the social structure that permits a high rate of development may be a consequence of the class struggle, of military adventure, of religious doctrine, or anything else. At the end of the day, it must stand before the court of the relative level of development of the productive forces, and if it is found wanting it will fail and be replaced by a new structure. The new structure may succeed or fail in turn, but those that succeed will proliferate or be emulated by others.

Here we must make a distinction between the initial selection of a social structure and endogenous change once it has been selected. The initial selection may well be the result of all sorts of factors, but the viability of a social form depends on the establishment of class relations that are suitable circumstances for the development of the material productive forces. The class struggle may impede productive development in many different ways: a dominant class whose domination is absolute may be tempted to derive its wealth simply from greater exploitation of subordinate classes rather than through any development of technique (indeed its exploitation of unfree labour may preclude the development of more sophisticated techniques); a subordinate class may gain a position so powerful that it is able successfully to resist the introduction of more efficient methods; or the class struggle may be so intense and bitter that development stagnates as a consequence.

The crucial historical experience adduced in support of the 'class struggle' critique is the French Revolution. But we can tell a story that is entirely consistent with our proposed revision of historical materialism. The early disintegration of feudalism within England permitted the development of the productive power of that country, as the success of the French peasantry in holding on to its historic privileges did not. The development of the productive forces in England explains the economic crises and relative military incapacity of eighteenth-century France.<sup>65</sup> The Revolution and its aftermath constitute a search-and-select process for a new social structure and the political and legal institutions to stabilize it. The unsatisfactory nature of this explains the instability of the French state until well into the twentieth century. We assert the primacy of the productive forces in selecting in favour of England and against France, but we need no longer be embarrassed by the failure of French industry to take off after the Revolution. Whereas classical historical materialism might have expected the adoption of a new social form to provide an environment for the takeoff of the productive forces, for this revision the immediate selection of a satisfactory social form and legal and political superstructure would be a happy, but unforeseen, accident.

### Fettering

One of the core claims of the 1859 Preface is that from forms of

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<sup>65</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, Cambridge 1979, emphasizes the importance of exogenous factors in the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions. However, she explicitly rejects both the development and primacy theses of traditional historical materialism.

development of the productive forces, social relations turn into their fetters. The question arises of whether the development of the productive forces is absolutely blocked at a certain stage, or whether it is simply the case that alternative social arrangements would encourage their more rapid development. So-called 'absolute' development fettering might, if it were to come about, provide a trigger for social revolution. It is extremely implausible, though, that such an absolute block on development would come about. While 'relative' fettering of development is a more likely eventuality, it is doubtful that people would engage in an activity as costly and dangerous as revolution simply to steepen the curve of productive development.

Because of these difficulties, one alternative gloss on Marx has been the suggestion that what social relations fetter is not the development of the productive forces but their effective use. This too comes in 'absolute' and 'relative' versions. Taking the 'relative' version (as the more plausible), the claim would be that although capitalism might indeed be an effective social form for developing technological and scientific knowledge, socialism would be more effective in putting that knowledge to work. But as Cohen has pointed out, following Schumpeter, the productive forces actually at the disposal of a developmentally efficient but use-inefficient social form will quickly outstrip those at the disposal of a use-efficient but developmentally inefficient one. 'Use-fettering' just seems to lead us back to development fettering.<sup>7</sup>

None of these exegetical proposals seems to provide us with what we need, namely a basis on which revolutions might plausibly occur that it is plausible to suppose might itself occur. John McMurtry has drawn attention to a number of passages that support a slightly different reading of Marx,<sup>8</sup> among them part of the 1846 letter to Annenkov: 'Men never relinquish what they have won, but this does not mean they never relinquish the social form in which they have acquired certain productive forces. On the contrary, in order that they may not be deprived of the result attained and forfeit the fruits of civilization, they are obliged, from the moment when the form of their commerce no longer corresponds to the productive forces acquired, to change all their traditional social forms.' McMurtry interprets this and other passages as making the claim that revolution is necessary if the productive forces acquired are not themselves to be forfeit.<sup>9</sup> But, as Keith Graham points out, they might also sustain a 'use'-forfeiture interpretation.<sup>20</sup> Faced with the prospect of losing the benefits of the productive forces, though not of the forces themselves, a society might

<sup>7</sup> See Cohen's discussion of these points in *History, Labour and Freedom*, pp. 109–123. My remarks here fail to do full justice to his argument, in particular his suggestion that even if capitalism is a superior developer of the productive forces in quantitative terms, socialism might yet be preferred because of the quality of life it offers.

<sup>8</sup> John McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx's World View*, Princeton 1978, pp. 205ff.

<sup>9</sup> That is to say, McMurtry interprets 'forfeit' as involving the retrogression of the productive forces. Cohen agrees that, taken literally, these texts support McMurtry's view, but argues that, when taken together with other passages, they represent 'a hyperbolic formulation of the idea of absolute stagnation'. *History, Labour and Freedom*, p. 123.

<sup>20</sup> See Keith Graham, *Karl Marx*, Hemel Hempstead forthcoming 1991, for an elaboration of this. I am indebted to him for allowing me to make use of his original point.

well be thrown into a revolutionary crisis. Perhaps the most successful modernizing revolution ever (a revolution 'from above'), the Japanese Meiji restoration, was a response to just such a perceived threat from the ships of Commodore Perry.

It was a mistake for Marx to conceive of fettering in the way that he did because it leads to the conclusion that a social system such as capitalism will fail from causes intrinsic to it. This inevitably diverted Marx and his successors into their discussions of the falling rate of profit, the 'breakdown controversy', and so forth. And it also presents us with the need to explain historical examples of rapid technological progress which fail to generate a breakthrough to capitalism, such as China under the Sung dynasty (960–1279 AD).<sup>21</sup> But on the model presented here we would not expect to see social revolutions in countries that are relatively more advanced than their competitors. Social revolution in China was no more likely as a consequence of the level of development than revolution is today in the most advanced capitalist states such as the United States, West Germany or Japan.

It is not the countries that enjoy the most developed productive forces that will experience crisis and revolution, but, on the contrary, those on the margins of the most dynamic social system. The more advanced countries will tend to enjoy the fruits of their possession of advanced technology and a consequent level of prosperity that will make for social stability. Countries on the periphery, however, will find themselves economically undermined by the competition from countries enjoying higher levels of productivity. Social dislocation is more likely in such circumstances. This is the basic insight that underlies Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. And permanent revolution also carries with it an understanding of the conditions that must be met if a revolution is to succeed. While backward countries partially integrated into the main system are the most likely sites of revolutions, it is unlikely that the adoption of a more advanced social form will compensate for the technological inferiority of the country which adopts that form.<sup>22</sup> For a new form to supplant an old one, either it must make possible an almost miraculous leap in productivity or the form itself must be adopted by more advanced countries. Only in exceptional circumstances—perhaps defeat in war, for example—is it likely that the shock of revolution on the periphery will give rise to revolution at the centre.

The foregoing remarks are initially most pertinent to the capitalism-

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London 1974, pp. 536ff.

<sup>22</sup> The case of France is interesting because the Revolution of 1789 cannot plausibly be said to have issued in a regime which permitted the rapid development of the productive forces. On our model, then, this might account for the prolonged instability of French politics with upheavals in 1789–99, 1815, 1830, 1841–51 and 1870–71 (not to mention 1936, 1940, 1958 and 1968). The Revolution may have permitted changes which allowed France to compete effectively in the international arena despite being more backward economically than England, for instance by allowing the creation of a national army whose citizen-soldiers could be employed more flexibly than those of rival armies. See Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640–1945*, New York 1955, p. 27, quoted by Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, p. 198.

to-socialism transition. In the transition from feudalism to capitalism, in a world with a much less developed international division of labour, proto-capitalist England had more chance to develop without destabilization from the feudal 'centre'.<sup>23</sup> 'Socialism in one country', and the similar policies pursued by modernizing elites throughout the 'Third World', can be seen as an attempt to mimic this relative isolation by opting out of the international division of labour through autarky. But the notion that such a system could compete with a capitalist system—found in works like Sweezy's *Theory of Capitalist Development* and in some of Khrushchev's more triumphalist declarations—was misplaced. Although the socialized economy of the Soviet Union did enjoy some impressive achievements, the isolation of an autarkic 'socialism', deprived of the productive power of the West, inevitably gave rise to authoritarian political forms that made impossible the development of the cultural and political maturity which alone could enable the strides in social productivity necessary for the victory of socialism. Socialism in one country was, in the long term, a self-defeating strategy.

### Imperialistic Diffusion

I use the term 'imperialistic diffusion' to cover the case where a social form is diffused by the military or economic power of a society. I do not intend to use the term in a way that is extensionally equivalent to the Marxist technical term 'imperialism'. Marx was keenly aware of the fact of imperialistic diffusion and was usually enthusiastic about its progressive effects. In the *Communist Manifesto*, he endorses a view that is wholly consistent with the suggestions of this article: 'The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, that is, to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.'<sup>24</sup>

But Marx did not only give his endorsement to battering down such 'Chinese walls' with metaphorical heavy artillery. His writings on British rule in India are replete with enthusiasm for the progressive effects of imperialist domination: 'England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan was actuated by only the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever

<sup>23</sup> Alan Carling makes just this point in a paper which also invokes some evolutionary mechanisms to reduce the tension between Cohen's and Brenner's accounts of the transition from capitalism to feudalism 'Marx, Cohen and Brenner: Functionalism versus Rational Choice in the Marxist Theory of History', *MA Paper*, Warwick 1989.

<sup>24</sup> 'The Communist Manifesto', in D. Fernbach, ed., *The Revolutions of 1848*, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 71.

may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.'<sup>25</sup>

Nor was India the only example of the generalization of a social form by force of arms in Marx's time. Another notable case—where there is a happy congruence between the moral and political instincts of most socialists and the imperatives of history—concerns the export of capitalist relations of production by the Union to the Confederacy during the American Civil War. Since the time that Marx was writing, capitalist forms have been exported all over the globe, both by economic pressure and by force of arms. There is a parallel also in the extension of the Soviet system by force of arms, following the Second World War.

Much of this article has concentrated on the productive potentialities of social forms, whilst neglecting the importance of legal and political institutions. But, of course, the capacity of a social form—such as capitalism—to generate improvements in productivity depends crucially upon the capacity of such institutions to manage and contain class antagonisms. One study that would appear to give some support to the hypothesis advanced here—namely that international competition and conflict is the crucial mechanism in selecting social and political forms—is a paper by David Cameron which explores possible explanations for the growth in state activity within advanced capitalist nations.<sup>26</sup> Cameron found that the openness of the economy 'is the best single predictor of the growth of public revenues relative to the economic product of the nation.' The 'open' economies were usually small states with little choice but to participate fully in the international division of labour. Open economies were usually characterized by high levels of industrial concentration which facilitated the growth of employers' and trade-union organizations encompassing a high proportion of firms and employees. The high degree of organization both provided a basis for powerful social-democratic parties, and made likely the emergence of 'corporatist' structures.

### The End of History?

It is presently fashionable to ask whether the defeat of the Soviet experiment foreshadows the 'end of history', century upon century of liberal-democratic capitalism.<sup>27</sup> At least two responses to this question would not be inconsistent with the approach adopted here: (1) Continued inequalities between the centre and the periphery will lead to instability in the periphery, and oscillation among authoritarian capitalist, pseudosocialist and liberal-democratic capitalist forms. History would not 'end', it would become cyclical. (2) There is no reason to suppose that, even at the centre, homogeneity of social and political structures would become the norm. Cameron's research suggests that the imperatives of international competition impose

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<sup>25</sup> 'The British Rule in India', in D. Fernbach ed., *Surveys from Exile*, Harmondsworth 1973, pp. 306–7. For a discussion of this and other relevant texts, see Brendan O'Leary, *The Asiatic Mode of Production*.

<sup>26</sup> David R. Cameron, 'The Expansion of the Public Economy: A Comparative Analysis', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 72, 1978, pp. 1243–61.

<sup>27</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History', *The National Interest*, Summer 1989, pp. 3–17.

different political structures, depending on how a state is related to the world market. States with highly differentiated economies that have a large internal market (such as the United States) are unlikely to acquire the same forms as Sweden or Austria.

But it is also possible to venture a little outside this framework. The imperative to increase the productive forces or perish may well have applied to just one period of human development. When industrial development comes face to face with ecological disaster, it is to be hoped that political choices can be brought to dominate market forces.<sup>28</sup> The pressures of international competition seem to dictate that poor countries must industrialize rapidly if they are to relieve their present condition; and the environmental consequences of their doing so are awful to contemplate. Liberal-democratic capitalism looks ill-equipped to deal with such a challenge. It would perhaps be the greatest irony of history if the mission of socialism proved not to be the rapid development of human productive power, but rather its containment well below any level that scientific and technical knowledge might render possible.

### Replies to Some Possible Objections

It may be thought that the suggestion here advanced—that competition and conflict among societies selects in favour of those social forms most appropriate for the development of the productive forces—is too dependent on an analogy with biological evolution. However, although the processes may be analogous, the argument is not one from analogy. Evolutionary mechanisms are found in many contexts from economic theory to computer programs, and it should not be forgotten that Darwin's researches were partly inspired by Malthus. The point is that biological evolution, the evolutionary theory of the firm, and the theory advanced here, all make use of the same kind of *explanation*.

More substantially, perhaps, we can anticipate a Popperian objection, which Kai Nielsen discusses in an article that also endorses elements of Semenov's view. 'We can be confident that acorns generate oak trees because we have, or can come readily to have, numerous examples, in varied circumstances, of such a development. But "human history as a whole" like "the universe" is not something of which we have a lot of instances.'<sup>29</sup> We may have 'explained' or allowed for societies that (for example) permit the productive forces to stagnate indefinitely (in the absence of external competition), but do not such allowances result in a theory that is devoid of any explanatory power: we can fit it to any facts we choose. But as Richard Hudelson has observed, the fact that 'we are forever confined to the observation of one unique process does not mean that we are forever confined to one unique

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<sup>28</sup> For an outline of some of the difficulties of securing international collective action on these lines, see Michael Taylor and Hugh Ward, 'Chickens, Whales, and Lumpy Goods. Alternative Models of Public-Goods Provision', *Political Studies*, 30, 1982, pp. 350–70.

<sup>29</sup> Kai Nielsen, 'On Taking Historical Materialism Seriously', *Dialogue* xxi, 1983, pp. 319–38.

observation.<sup>30</sup> A developmental law claim 'may entail a number of predictions about the occurrence of events at various stages in the unique process it purports to explain.' And indeed the thesis advanced here expects and predicts that social forms that are relatively inefficient at developing the productive forces will be eliminated once they come into competition or conflict with more efficient forms.<sup>31</sup>

It may also be objected, following from this, that to allow military power to substitute for developmental efficiency in an ad hoc way, is to undermine this last claim. Indeed there is a problem here, but it may be resolvable if a good theory can be produced that relates military to economic power in a systematic way, and explains the former in terms of the latter. Even here, we may not be able to dispense with phrases such as 'in the long run', which reflect the inevitable shortcomings of this type of theory.

It will also be charged, and with some justice, that the theory is a generalization to the whole of world history of tendencies at work in the modern period alone. It is certainly true that the relationship of military to economic power is clearer in the modern period, and also that the gradual movement of international relations and the international economy from small regions to the global arena gives a powerful impetus to the processes outlined. Nevertheless, it is impossible to say, in advance of concrete investigations, how far the hypothesis may be valid for earlier periods.

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Hudelson, 'Popper's Critique of Marx', *Philosophical Studies*, 37, 1980, pp. 262, 264. As quoted in Nielsen, p. 334.

<sup>31</sup> The defeat of the British in the nineteenth century at the hands of Afghan tribes, and the similar failure of the Soviet Union in the twentieth, might be a revealing counterexample.

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# 84 *new left review*

## THE REVENGE OF THE PAST

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André Gorz	Labour and Post-Industrialism
Ed Halliday	Confrontation in the Gulf
He Jenson	Working with Feminism
Her Bürger	The Tangles of Postmodernity
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**Carling/Callinicos/Wood on 'Rational Choice'**

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The Gulf crisis has furnished the United States with a heaven-sent opportunity to exploit divisions in the Arab world and to prove that it is still the hegemonic capitalist state, alone possessed of truly global strategic military capacity. It has orchestrated an extraordinary coalition, partly through arm-twisting, partly through appeals to capitalist solidarity, but also because the invasion and occupation of Kuwait was widely condemned. The United States itself has, of course, recently invaded Panama and Grenada and bombed Libya, while abetting Israeli incursions and annexations. But it is nevertheless happy now to be championing non-interventionist rectitude. Saddam Hussein's action was wrong in principle and brutal in execution. The former population of Kuwait has every reason to detest the prospect of being ruled by a man who has imprisoned, tortured and killed so many opponents, and subjected Kurdish villages to gas attacks. Yet the Anglo-American response was prompted by quite other considerations—essentially the fear that control of Kuwait, let alone Saudi Arabia, would make Iraq strong enough to defy the West. The most hawkish members of the anti-Iraqi coalition, the USA and Britain, have had the further motive of recovering the initiative on the international stage, using military muscle and bluster to compensate for economic weakness. It is the West's thirst for cheap oil, fuelling an unsustainable and unequal pattern of consumption, which renders it suddenly sensitive to the viciously repressive character of a regime that, yesterday, it was arming against Iran. Problems on the home front gave Bush and Thatcher their own transparent political motives for taking up a belligerent stance. In this issue Fred Halliday explores the complex regional and international dynamic of the Gulf crisis to date.

The support of so many states, including Arab states, was secured partly because the initial reaction was formulated through the United Nations and was limited to economic sanctions. In themselves the initial UN resolutions against Iraq offered an appropriate and justified response to the occupation of Kuwait—though they would have been better if they had included a clear commitment to the introduction of democracy in Kuwait. There should have been UN sanctions against Israel as strong as this, instead of the lavish US aid that was actually forthcoming. Indeed the reaction to Iraq's seizure of Kuwait provided an excellent occasion for belatedly adding substance to earlier UN condemnations of Israeli policy; it is a remarkable fact that neither the Soviet Union, nor Egypt,

nor other past sponsors of such condemnations, were willing to insist on this. Approval of the UN sanctions against Iraq, however, does not imply support for all the actions supposedly undertaken in their name, including military ultimata and the interdiction of humanitarian supplies.

If the original UN sanctions were given time they could be very effective. But Washington and London find unacceptable the prospect of persisting with peaceful sanctions. The size of the expeditionary forces shows that they were never intended for any purely defensive purpose. Socialists should vigilantly oppose any escalation to military action. War will necessarily entail great loss of life, destruction and suffering, compounded by an incalculable but patent threat of ecological disaster. A Western victory is unlikely to be used to promote democracy in the region since this would lead, sooner rather than later, to the ejection of the ruling cliques on whom the oil companies depend. On the other hand, it is certain to provide the excuse for an enlarged Western garrison. The armed intervention of these outside powers must be opposed for just the same reasons that colonialism had to be defeated in the past. The Left should not support the military ambitions of any of the predators now confronting one another in the desert. The only lasting salvation for the peoples of the Middle East will be one they achieve through their own efforts—through insistence on democratic rights and control of their own economic resources. If such a prospect now seems remote, at least there could be an immediate settlement, achieved perhaps through an International Conference on the Middle East, which met the democratic aspirations of Palestinians and Kurds as well as Kuwaitis.

In the early part of this century both Bolshevism and Menshevism had many thousands of adherents in the Transcaucasus. As Ronald Suny shows, revolutionary opposition to the Tsars channelled the aspirations both of a vigorous young workers' movement and of the region's mosaic of variously oppressed nationalities. In a fascinating study of the 'revenge of the past' Suny argues that nearly seven decades of Soviet rule have forged a militant sense of nationhood. The rival national movements of the Transcaucasus have played an important role in the unfolding of the general crisis of the Soviet Federation. Partly in consequence, the former strongholds of proletarian cosmopolitanism have now been buried by increasingly homogeneous national groupings. While the ultimate fates of the latter are, as yet, far from clear, it is necessary to register the dramatic re-entry of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan as new and stronger national entities than ever before.

Liberal and conservative commentators have liked to equate the collapse of Communist power with the disappearance of any ideal alternative to capitalism. Yet it has long been clear that creative socialist thinking about the future of post-industrial societies, to which André Gorz has made such an outstanding contribution, has owed nothing to any supposed Soviet model. In the essay by Gorz that we publish here, he explores the vital significance of a dramatic reduction in necessary working time for a social order which hoped to overcome the wasteful and compulsive dynamic of capitalist accumulation and consumerism.

Gorz calls for a far-reaching reorientation of the strategy of traditional labour movements. The fate of the trade unions in the United States demonstrates the disastrous consequences of narrow economism and business unionism. The impressive achievements of the thirties and forties have been dissipated over the last two decades, as trade unions have failed to organize new sections of the work force, and have seen earnings decline and conditions deteriorate. In this issue we publish an exchange between Kim Moody and Staughton Lynd that examines why US labour was worsted, and how it might make a new start.

The apparent disappearance in our epoch of the boundary between representation and reality, giving way to a heightened and generalized commodification of the aesthetic and aestheticization of the commodity, has produced a predictably catastrophist—and largely gestural—post-modern thesis of 'the end of art'. In the lecture we publish here, Peter Bürger concedes some of the analysis while contesting the conclusion, and suggesting that postmodernist theorizations neglect the role of aesthetic discourse in the constitution of the modern art object.

In an essay of self-discovery, Jane Jenson here examines the ways in which her convictions as a feminist and socialist have motivated and informed her study of Canadian political economy, including in areas seemingly dominated by technical issues—'the big questions tackled by the big boys', as she puts it.

Also in this issue we publish an exchange between Alan Carling, Alex Callinicos and Ellen Meiksins Wood arising out of the latter's critique of 'Rational Choice Marxism' published in NLR 177.

Finally, with this issue the editorial committee of the Review has been considerably enlarged, as readers may see from the inside front cover. With this added strength the Review will address the challenge presented to the Left by the new world in which we live.

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## The Revenge of the Past: Socialism and Ethnic Conflict in Transcaucasia

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when Social Democrats agonized over the emerging 'national question', Russian Marxists sought at one and the same time to win allies among the non-Russian nationalities and to combat the project of the nationalists to splinter the unitary state.<sup>1</sup> Secure in their faith that 'national differences and antagonisms between peoples are vanishing gradually from day to day', and that 'the supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster', Bolshevik theorists were opposed to political solutions that would divert the flow of history and promote ethnic identity. Lenin, Stalin, the Armenian Bolshevik Stepan Shahumian, and others were adamant in their opposition to federalism, and to both the Austro-Marxist principle of 'extraterritorial national cultural autonomy' (each nationality represented in parliament no matter where its members live) and the moderate nationalist principle of 'territorial national cultural autonomy' (ethnicity defining autonomous territorial political units). Leninists preferred 'regional autonomy', in which political units would not have

ethnic designations. The 'proletarian solution' to the nationality question was to preserve the unitary state while allowing for local self-government. Within the socialist state complete cultural and linguistic freedom was to be guaranteed. While for Lenin national self-determination meant that a nationality could choose to become fully independent, those nationalities that stayed within the socialist state would have neither the right to an autonomous political territory nor to a federative relationship to the centre.

The Bolsheviks' pre-revolutionary thinking on the national question did not survive the Revolution intact. The new Soviet state was both federative, at least in name and theory, and based on ethnic political units. Moreover, the very expectation that such an arrangement would lead to the consolidation of ethnicity, rather than its disappearance, proved to be correct for the larger nationalities. Rather than a 'melting pot', the Soviet Union became the incubator of new nations. In Transcaucasia, the freer movement of peoples that marked the tsarist period, which had led to cosmopolitan populations in the largest cities, was reversed, and ethnic nationals gravitated toward their own republic.<sup>1</sup> By 1990 Armenia and Azerbaijan were almost completely ethnically homogeneous, or monoethnic, societies. Georgians desperately desire such a goal for their own republic, and those surviving minorities who live in the republics face an uncertain future. Thousands of refugees from Armenia and Azerbaijan may soon be joined by those from Georgia. As the Soviet Union enters a new age of freedom, as a thousand flowers bloom in its intellectual and political gardens, the noxious weeds of intolerant nationalism divide the small and increasingly vulnerable nations of Transcaucasia.

### Demographic and Cultural Renationalization

Whatever the ultimate aims of Soviet nationality policy (before the Gorbachev revolution)—acculturation and bilingualism, assimilation, or the creation of a multinational 'Soviet people'—the dominant developments in the southern Soviet republics of Transcaucasia have moved in a different direction. Two contradictory processes dominated all others: (1) a forced modernization that transformed agrarian societies into urban industrial ones; and (2) the ethnic consolidation and growing cohesion of the major nationalities. The intensification of national identification within the republics has blended toxically with a growing anxiety about the effects of modernization, mobility, and accommodation to Soviet norms. While other Soviet republics might complain of demographic and linguistic Russification, or too great interference from the Kremlin, Transcaucasia has enjoyed an unusual degree of cultural and political autonomy that has unevenly benefited and disadvantaged the peoples within each republic. By the

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to my colleagues at the University of Michigan, Geoff Eley and Roman Szporluk, who read an earlier version of this essay and made very helpful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> 'Transcaucasia' (*Zakavkaz'sk* in Russian) refers to the mountainous isthmus south of the Great Caucasus Mountains; specifically to the three Soviet republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The Caucasus or North Caucasus (*Severnyi Kavkaz*) is administratively part of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and is home to dozens of small nationalities. 'Caucasia' (*Kavkaz*) refers to the entire region, encompassing Transcaucasia and the North Caucasus.



eve of perestroika, Transcaucasia was governed by powerful ethnic mafias that both fostered local nationalisms and encouraged the rise of 'second economies'. Ethnic minorities within Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia—among them the Armenians of Baku and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region; the Georgians (Ingilos), Jews, Talysh, Tats, and Udins in Azerbaijan; the Abkhaz, Ajars, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, and Osetins in Georgia; and Azerbaijanis and Kurds in the Armenian republic (not to mention Russians in all three republics)—have experienced a progressive marginalization and discrimination from the dominant, so-called 'titular' nationalities that run the republics.<sup>3</sup> The discontents of the peoples of Transcaucasia, both with Soviet socialism as they had known it and with their own local leaderships, exploded in the winter of 1988 into the first massive expressions of popular nationalism that the USSR had known in nearly seventy years.

The ironies of the effects of an ostensibly Marxist nationality policy on the Transcaucasian peoples had become progressively more apparent in each decade of Soviet rule. A largely Russian leadership in Moscow with an ostensibly internationalist ideology had overseen the demographic and cultural renationalization of the southern republics. One hundred years earlier, Erevan, the capital of Soviet Armenia, had had a Muslim majority; Tbilisi (Georgia) and Baku (Azerbaijan) had been largely Russian and Armenian cities in the early years of Soviet rule. As the Soviet Union entered its seventh decade, these cities had become, in the full ethnic sense, the capitals of national states. After decades of silence, an urbanized population, the children of former peasants, inspired by a dissident nationalism, now poured into the streets.

Armenians began the wave of mass nationalist mobilizations in the Soviet Union in mid February 1988, when they marched, with exemplary discipline, first in Stepanakert (Karabakh) and then in Erevan. When news came of the killing of an Azerbaijani near Karabakh, young Azerbaijanis rampaged through Sumgait attacking Armenians. Casual observers, now more than ever willing to demonize the forces of Islam, saw those obscure struggles at the edge of Europe as examples of 'tribal conflict', 'religious war', or 'ancient enmity' between Muslims and Christians. Yet from its inception the Karabakh conflict was a layered problem—in part structured by quite separate religious and cultural allegiances, in part based on the uneven social and political development of Armenians and Azerbaijanis. A nationalist struggle for recovery of ethnic irredenta was combined with a broader movement for political reform and ecological survival. As complex and obscure as the causes of the battles of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and later the Georgians and Abkhaz, might be for Western observers;

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<sup>3</sup> The Abkhaz are related to the non-Indo-European peoples of the North Caucasus, speak a distinct language, and have pressed in recent years for merger with Russia. The Osetins, who live in the Southern Osetin Autonomous District in Georgia, are descendants of the medieval Alans, an Indo-Iranian people, and are administratively separated from their countrymen in the USSR. The Ajars are Muslim Georgians, generally considered to be one subgroup of the Georgian nationality—like the Svans, Mingrelians, Pshavi, and others. The Talysh and Tats speak languages related to the Iranian branches of Indo-European, and the Tats are divided among Muslim, Armenian Christian, and Jewish believers. The language of the Christian Udins is related to the Lezgin subgroup of the Daghestani group of North Caucasian languages.

however deep their historical roots; these first—and to date, most intractable—nationality wars can be understood as the conscious responses of individuals and groups with definite ideas of their interests, their enemies, and the dangers that face their nation.

### The Making of Nations

In sharpest contrast to the view that nationalism was properly a subject for intellectual history, Marxists long maintained that modern nations were the product of the capitalist mode of production, and were related to it in such a dependent way that with the end of capitalism nations themselves would begin to disappear. The nationalist legitimization of independent nation-states constituted on the basis of ethnicity was seriously challenged by the Marxist claim that nations were neither natural nor eternal, and that priority must be given to class as the foundation of a future nationless society. Yet twentieth-century experience—the emergence of ethnically based states in the wake of World War I; the Leninist concession to the power of nationalism, both in the recognition of the right to national self-determination and the formation of the first federal state based on ethnic units; as well as the degeneration of nationalism into the virulent racism and expansionism of the 1930s—made unsustainable the argument that nationalism and nationality were disappearing in the solvent of economic development and social mobility. Just as Bolshevik politicians had understood the need to accommodate the actual loyalties and aspirations of their citizens, so Marxist theorists had to moderate the more extreme reductions of ethnic culture and national formation to economics. Even Soviet analysts, constrained by dictated theoretical parameters, were forced to recognize the independence of culture long before Armenian protesters in Karabakh and Azerbaijani militants in Sumgait moved into the streets and trampled underfoot the faded banners proclaiming 'friendship of the peoples'.

As suggestive as the connections between socio-ethnic structures and social and nationalist movements may be, no easy deduction from one to the other can be made. Yet the historic contextualization of national formation—its location in specific economic, ethnic, and social relations of subordination and dominance—at least renders the problem of nation-making and the emergence of nationalism subject to historical analysis and, hopefully, explanation. The approach of an earlier historiography (Hans Kohn, C.J.H. Hayes) that extended back conceptually to the eighteenth-century German originators of nationalist thought (Herder, Fichte), emphasized the emotional, religious aspects of nationalist loyalties; and, while nationalism might be described and typologized, such a state of mind (*Nationalbewusstsein*) ultimately defied explanation.<sup>4</sup> The 'living and active corporate will' (Kohn) that turned ethnic raw material into conscious politics was elusive and historically disconnected; its appearance seemed mysterious, even magical, and was compatible with the assumptions of nationalists that the essence of nationality was natural and eternal, and needed but the right opportunity to be fully released.

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<sup>4</sup> Hans Kohn, *The Age of Nationalism*, New York 1962; *The Idea of Nationalism*, 2nd edition, New York 1967; Carlton J.H. Hayes, 'Nationalism', *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, xi, New York 1938, pp. 240–49

As historians and theorists of nationality and nationalism have moved steadily toward a more historically grounded and contingent understanding of the making of nations and national consciousness, the Marxist classics have repeatedly been faulted for their subordination or neglect of nationality. Yet much of the most significant reassessment of nationalist theory has come from writers close to (or coming out of) Western Marxist traditions.<sup>5</sup> Beginning with Tom Nairn's influential essay 'The Modern Janus', followed by Eric Hobsbawm's critical response, Geoff Eley's discussion of nationalism and social history, Miroslav Hroch's empirical investigations of the formation of national intelligentsias in Eastern Europe, and Benedict Anderson's evocation of 'imagined communities', the discussion of nationalism has moved away from sterile definitions and typologies into historically grounded elaborations of the actual making of nationalities and nations.<sup>6</sup>

The 'making of nations' is increasingly understood as a process at once shaped by socioeconomic and political developments, and conceived and articulated in an emerging national discourse. Whatever territorial, cultural, linguistic, religious, or social links tie people together, nationality, not unlike class, is formed as those links are understood through experience to be the most meaningful in promoting and protecting a people. Nationality is made, again in a process similar to the formation of class, when people find they can communicate more easily with some than with others; when they begin to define who is within the group and who are the 'others'; when they begin to gain the capacity to act in the 'interests' that they believe they share, and which may be opposed to the 'others'. Making nationality, like making class, is a cultural as well as social process of creating an 'imagined community', which finds its expression in symbols, rituals, flags, songs, collective actions, the articulation and representation of its goals. Both nationality and class have their discontents and their utopias. They seek to eliminate the former by achieving the latter. Whether they get their history right or not—and they usually do not, to paraphrase Ernest Renan—nationality and nation are made in the active elaboration of a national tradition, a making of a usable past that underlies their claims to political recognition, autonomy, sovereignty or independence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a critique of the inadequacy of Marx's thinking on nationalism, and an appreciation of the early theorist of nationalism, Friedrich List, see Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List*, Oxford 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Nairn, 'The Modern Janus', *NLR* 94, November–December 1975, pp. 3–28; *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, London 1977, Eric J. Hobsbawm, 'Some Reflections on "The Break-up of Britain"', *NLR* 105, September–October 1977, pp. 3–23; Geoff Eley, 'Nationalism and Social History', *Social History*, no. 6, 1981, pp. 83–107; Miroslav Hroch, *Die Vorstufen der nationalen Bewegung bei den kleinen Völkern Europas*, Acta Universitatis Carolinae Philosophica et Historica, monographia 24, Prague 1968; *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, trans Ben Fowkes, Cambridge 1985; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London 1983.

<sup>7</sup> The discussion here of the making of nationality and its similarity to the making of class is indebted to what I would call the ethnographic approach of Edward Thompson in his classic work, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London 1963), and to the theorists mentioned above in footnote 6.

In the Russian Empire of the late nineteenth century, nationalist political discourses were largely limited to urban intelligentsias and had little resonance among the largely peasant populations of the non-Russian peoples. Even among oppositional intellectuals, populist and Marxist socialisms were far more influential, though all three groups of activists found themselves isolated from their chosen constituents. While in central Russia the peasant question and the potential for capitalist development was at the centre of the Left's discussions in the 1890s, far to the south, in Transcaucasia, the dominant questions were the place of ethnicity in social struggles, class versus nationality, and the dependence of nationality on the apparently universal evolution of capitalism.

In the course of the nineteenth century, three related processes—the imposition of tsarist rule; the rise of the market and capitalist relations of production; and the emergence of secular national intelligentsias—initiated a long transformation of the ethno-religious communities of Transcaucasia into more politically conscious and mobilized nationalities. Tsarism eliminated barriers between Georgian principalities, brought Armenians of Russia and the former Persian provinces under a single legal order, and imposed uniform laws and taxation systems on the Muslims of Transcaucasia. Imperial rule brought relative peace and security, the fostering of commerce and industry, the growth of towns, the building of railroads, and the slow end to the isolation of many villages.

The three major peoples of Transcaucasia developed unevenly and at different rates: Armenians were the most urban, Azerbaijanis the least; Georgians and Azerbaijanis were the more compact populations, living in coherent territories, while Armenians were dispersed. Clerics dominated Azerbaijani society; the old national nobility held sway among Georgians; and a merchant middle class was the most powerful social group among the Armenians. Though intellectuals of all three peoples were deeply influenced by the debates in Russia, and shared an appreciation of the insights of Western Marxists, the leading Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian intellectuals and politicians developed disparate discourses that addressed the specific problems of their own people.

### Christian Caucasia

For two millennia, if not longer, Armenians and Georgians have possessed recognizable identities, first mentioned in the inscriptions and manuscripts of their Iranian and Greek neighbours, and later (from the fifth century AD) in texts in their own languages. Since the fourth century AD they have been Christian peoples, distinct from one another once the Georgians adopted Chalcedonian orthodoxy in the sixth century, distinct from the Muslim peoples who first appeared in the seventh century and half a millenium later began to settle in great numbers in the southern and eastern parts of Transcaucasia.<sup>8</sup> Though

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<sup>8</sup> While the Georgian Church, like the Orthodox churches of Greece and Russia, maintains the position of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) of 'one and the same Christ in two natures without confusion or change, division or separation', the Armenian Church retains a modified monophysite Christology that holds that Christ possesses

linguistically and religiously distinct, their cultures were similar, derivative from one another; and that very closeness gave rise to disputes that continue to the present—about whether the original Georgian alphabet had an Armenian origin, or whether this church or that should be attributed to a Georgian or Armenian author. As important as such claims to priority or originality might be to modern nationalists, the disagreements are themselves testimony both to the mutuality and interpenetration of the two Christian cultures of Caucasia, as well as to the need on the part of 'patriots' to establish borders, however artificially, between them.

These ethno-religious communities of ancient times or the Middle Ages, whatever the claims to pedigree attached to them by nationalists, were quite different in self-conception and structure from nations of our own time, and should not be collapsed into notions of modern nationhood. As Maxime Rodinson has pointed out, 'Before the modern epoch . . . societies of the national type—those that prefigured modern nations, extending beyond the earlier tribal structure, whatever they may be called—were characterized by extreme internal partitioning, which seems to me related quite simply to the insufficient force of the unifying factors . . . [T]he state still commanded limited means of action. Sub-administration, as it would be called today, was the rule and not the exception. This impelled leaders to administrate through the intermediary of multifarious bodies, sorts of sub-states that were also quasi-states.'<sup>9</sup> While pre-modern *ethnies* (to use a term borrowed from Anthony D. Smith) shared a collective name, a common myth of descent, a history and a distinctive culture, while they associated themselves with a specific territory and felt a sense of solidarity, they were not politicized, mobilized, and as 'territorialized' (identified with clear-cut territorial units) as nations in the modern sense are.

For medieval Georgians or Armenians the primary identity was with religion and the Church. Whether Armenian nobles lived in the Armenian heartland or in territory ruled by Georgian princes, they were identified by others and in their own minds as Armenian because they belonged to the Armenian, rather than the Orthodox, Church. Armenian authors referred to the land of the Armenians (*Haiastan*, *Haiots*

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<sup>8</sup> (cont.)

'one nature united in the Incarnate Word'. The Armenian Church rejects, however, the mingling of the two natures of Christ, and believes that Christ had 'both a divine and a human nature, a complete humanity animated by a rational soul'. (Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *The Armenians*, London 1969, p. 77)

<sup>9</sup> Maxime Rodinson, *Cult, Ghetto, and State: The Persistence of the Jewish Question*, London 1983, pp. 80–81.

<sup>10</sup> Smith has made the clearest and most useful distinction between pre-modern ethnic communities (*ethnies*) and modern nations, while underscoring the essential continuity between them. He lists five characteristics of an 'ideal-typical' *ethnie*: 'a large mass of peasants and artisans in villages and small market towns, subject to various restrictions on their freedom . . . and wedded to local "folk cultures" . . . influenced loosely by the nearest Great Traditions'; competing urban elites; a tiny stratum of priests who transmit the symbolism of the belief-system to various parts of the population; 'a fund of myths, memories, values and symbols'; and processes of communication, transmission and socialization. (Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford 1986, p. 42)

*ashkharh*, *Erkir Haiots*), but they were usually speaking either about a number of polities or a single polity that controlled only a small part of the Armenian lands.<sup>12</sup> In any case, the principal concern of the ecclesiastical authors of the classic histories was neither geopolitics nor territorial claims, but salvation in an otherworldly sense.<sup>13</sup> Overlapping this primary loyalty was the tie to the local dynast, the *nakhchatar* or *axat* (Armenian), or the *mlaveri* or *axnanti* (Georgian). Armenians might fight for Persian kings or Byzantine emperors, or even, as in 428 AD, ask their Iranian overlord to abolish the Armenian monarchy. On the Armenian plateau Christian princes joined Muslims or Mazdeists against their fellow Christians; and rather than polities unifying all Georgians or all Armenians under a common ruler, the fissiparous politics in Caucasia allowed for the larger empires to the east and west to dominate alternately the small states between them. Georgia at its medieval zenith was a multi-ethnic empire that included Armenians and a variety of Muslim peoples. Georgians did not use their modern word for Georgia (*sakartvelo*) until the fourteenth century when, indeed, eastern Georgia (*kartli*) was first united with western Georgia (*imereti*) in a common state under a single monarch.<sup>14</sup> Medieval Caucasian politics were local, infused with dynasticism and religious conflicts, and lacking a generalized, secular, ultimately territorial or ethno-cultural, sense of homeland or nation.

The history of the Caucasian Christians diverged radically after the eleventh century when the invasions of the Seljuk Turks pushed back the power of Byzantium, subdued the Armenians, but left the Georgians precariously independent. In the next several centuries the Armenian nobility was cut down, some surviving for a while in the kingdom of Lesser Armenia in Cilicia on the Mediterranean, others serving the Georgian kings as warriors, governors, or merchants. Armenia had lost its political identity by the late fourteenth century, and no Armenian state would exist until 1918. In Georgia autonomous principalities remained under Ottoman suzerainty in the west, and Iranian in the east. Only with the coming of the Russians at the beginning of the nineteenth century did the last Georgian monarchs lose their thrones.

The different experiences of the two peoples resulted in a unique ethno-class structure in Transcaucasia. Georgians, who lived compactly in their historic territory, were a largely peasant people with a dominant noble elite. Within a generation after the Russian conquest,

<sup>12</sup> While the Armenians called themselves *hai*, and their country *Haikastan*, other nations have borrowed the terms derived from the Greek sources, first by Hecataeus of Miletus (c. 550 BC), which referred to the *Armenoi* and to the Persian inscription of Darius I at Behistun which mentioned the country of *Armina*.

<sup>13</sup> See Nina Garsoian, 'Armenia in the Fourth Century: An Attempt to Redefine the Concepts "Armenia" and "Loyalty"', *Revue des études arméniennes*, nouvelle série, VIII, 1971, pp. 341-52.

<sup>14</sup> On medieval Georgia, see W. B. D. Allen, *A History of the Georgian People from the Beginning down to the Russian Conquest in the Nineteenth Century*, London 1932; David Marshall Lang, *The Georgians*, London 1966; and Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, Washington DC 1963. To the Russians, Georgia is known as *Gruziya*; to the Armenians as *Vrastan*; and to the Persians as *Gorgistan*. From the latter word comes the English word 'Georgia', though a popular explanation remains that it comes from St George, the country's patron.

the latter was successfully integrated into the tsarist civil and military service. Armenians, now scattered and divided between three empires (Russian, Ottoman and Persian), were nowhere a compact majority—except in Erivan province, where migrations after the series of Russo-Turkish wars gave Armenians a predominant position. Without their ancient nobility, largely eliminated by the time of the Mongol occupation and the fall of the last Armenian kingdom in the late fourteenth century, Armenian merchants and manufacturers took on a highly visible role in the development of industry and trade in both Turkey and Caucasia. Baku oil was pioneered by Armenians, and the economic growth of the ancient Georgian capital, Tiflis (Tbilisi), was largely an Armenian enterprise. As the leading class among Armenians, the merchants and petty industrialists of Tiflis, Baku, Istanbul and Smyrna presented non-Armenians with the most prevalent image of the Armenian. The merchant, sly and avaricious, became the stereotype of a whole people, as well as a convenient scapegoat.<sup>14</sup>

The sense of a continuous existence was fundamental to the national self-conceptions of the Armenian and Georgian proto-intelligentsias of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as they re-established the study of national history and literature. The early clerics and scholars who revived national historiographies and compiled the first modern dictionaries and grammars were displaced in mid century by the 'sons' or 'modernizers' who called for the use of the vernacular language, more secularized education, and an appreciation of the 'people'. The movement for national emancipation began as liberal and democratic movements of writers, journalists and teachers; but by the last decade of the nineteenth century the second group of nationalist intellectuals had been shunted aside by younger, more radical, socialists.<sup>15</sup> For these peoples, as for other small nations in Eastern Europe, the struggle for national emancipation was at once a struggle against the non-national or denationalized bourgeoisie, against the effects of an imperializing capitalism, and for full participation in a modern, European life.

### Socialism and National Revolution in Georgia

Although the origins and initial stages of Armenian and Georgian nationalism are strikingly similar, the distinct social structures of the two nationalities and their different political imperatives led to quite different nationalist ideologies and political trajectories. The Georgian noble elite, though integrated into the Russian nobility (*dvorianstvo*),

<sup>14</sup> Richard G. Hovannissian, ed., *The Armenian Image in History and Literature*, Malibu 1981.

<sup>15</sup> Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century*, Berkeley 1963; Anahide Ter Minassian, *Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1887–1912)*, Cambridge, Mass 1984; Ronald Grigor Suny, 'Populism, Nationalism, and Marxism: The Origins of Revolutionary Parties Among the Armenians of the Caucasus', *Armenian Review*, xxxii, vol. 2, no. 126, June 1979, pp. 134–51; and 'Marxism, Nationalism, and the Armenian Labor Movement in Transcaucasia, 1890–1903', *Armenian Review*, xxxiii, vol. 1, no. 129, March 1980, pp. 30–47. On the Georgians, see D.M. Lang, *A Modern History of Soviet Georgia*, New York 1962; R.G. Suny, 'The Emergence of Political Society in Georgia', in *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change*, ed., Michigan 1983, pp. 109–140.

failed to make a successful adjustment to the post-Emancipation economy, and their ideal of national harmony cutting across classes had little resonance beyond their own class and a few sympathetic intellectuals. With the nobility losing their economic and political position to Armenian merchants and industrialists, the Georgian intelligentsia, themselves often the offspring of *declassé* nobles, turned to a radical analysis of Georgia's condition. In the 1890s a number of graduates of the Tiflis Orthodox Seminary adapted Marxism, learned from Polish and Russian Social Democrats, to the Georgian situation. In the writings of the *mesame dasi* (Third Group), led by Noe Zhordania, both the bourgeoisie (which in this case was largely Armenian) and the autocracy (which was Russian) were seen as enemies of Georgian social and political freedom. Given the particular ethno-social composition of Georgia's society, the social and national struggles were successfully merged under a Marxist leadership that suppressed any hint of nationalism and linked up with Russian Social Democracy. National hostility was redirected: rather than expressing hostility toward the rule of ethnic Russians, the target was autocracy; rather than expressing resentment against Armenians, rhetoric was turned against the local bourgeoisie, which was largely Armenian.

The natural constituency for Georgian Social Democrats, the workers, was by 1905 supplemented by broad support (almost unique in the Russian Empire) among the peasantry. Flexible in their strategies, willing to build alliances with other social forces, and responsive to the participatory workers' movement that predated the Marxists in Georgia, the Georgian Social Democrats joined the Menshevik rather than the Bolshevik wing of the RSDRP after the schism of 1903. By the years of the first revolution, Georgian Marxist intellectuals, well-based among the urban workers of Tiflis and Batumi, found themselves at the head of a genuinely supra-class national liberation movement. The Mensheviks easily won the elections to the four state dumas (1906–1912), controlled soviets and councils in the towns and countryside in 1917, and were the overwhelming choice of Georgians in the elections to the Constituent Assembly (November 1917). Instead of a vertically integrating nationalism, Georgians demonstrated their political aspirations in an expressly non-nationalist socialist movement.<sup>16</sup>

### Nationalism and Social Revolution in Armenia

The Armenian experience as a geographically divided and endangered people led at first to a peculiar form of 'non-territorial nationalism', an imagined community that shared a culture, history and language, but had lost its hold on its historic homeland.<sup>17</sup> Within the Russian Empire, Armenians were scattered in urban centres like Tiflis, Baku and Rostov (Nor Nakhichevan), with a relatively compact Armenian peasantry in Erivan province. At the same time, an influential diaspora connected

<sup>16</sup> Noe Zhordania, *Mein leben*, Stanford 1968, Grigory Uratadze, *Vapstamanyra gruzinshgo natsional-demokratu*, Stanford 1968; R.G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Bloomington 1988, pp. 144–81.

<sup>17</sup> On the formation of the Armenian national intelligentsia, see the articles by George A. Bournoutian, R.G. Suny, Sarkis Shmavonian, Vahe Oshagan, and Gerard J. Libaridian, in *Armenian Review*, xxxvi, vol. 3, no. 143, Autumn 1983.



the educated and business people of Anatolia and Transcaucasia with Europe, the Middle East, and even India. Here was a historic nation, then, with an educated urban bourgeoisie, but one disconnected socially and by virtue of distance or international borders from the heartland of its own people, which lay in eastern Anatolia.

Despite the increase, in absolute terms, of Armenians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and their continued dominion over the largest cities of the Caucasus economically and politically, Armenians increasingly perceived themselves in a vulnerable demographic and political position. The relative status of the largest Armenian community, that of the Armenian plateau of eastern Anatolia, declined with the rapid growth of the Kurdish population, the immigration of the Balkan Muslims, Circassians and other Muslims from the Caucasus, and the emigration of Armenians, particularly after the massacres of 1894-96. Already a minority in a heavily Turkish and Kurdish population, now ever more the victims of Muslim competitors for land and influence, Armenians in Turkey in the 1870s and 1880s filed numerous complaints and petitions with Ottoman officials and Western diplomatic representatives. But the turn toward Europe only antagonized Turkish officials, and led to the growing sense that Armenians were a foreign, subversive element in the Sultan's realm.

Impressed by the urgency of finding a political solution, the Armenian intelligentsia of the Russian Empire directed its efforts toward nationalists in Turkey. In contrast to the Georgians, the Armenian revolutionary parties, founded at the end of the 1880s and the beginning of the 1890s, disavowed joint solutions with other parties of the Russian Empire, and sent their cadres to organize in Turkey. By means of 'propaganda of the deed' and examples of militant sacrifice, Armenian revolutionaries attempted to mobilize a rather passive and demoralized peasantry in western Armenia, while at the same time inciting Western powers to come to the aid of beleaguered Christians. Though there were a number of spectacular examples of 'resistance' by armed Armenians (Zeitun, Sassun), the revolutionaries never achieved a high degree of mass mobilization. At the turn of the century they cooperated with Turkish oppositionists, precursors of the Young Turks, in the hope that an Armenian future within the Ottoman Empire would be secured with the overthrow of Abdul Hamid II and the establishment of a constitutional regime. Because of the self-destruction of one major party, the Social Democratic Hnchaks, and the relative isolation of the liberals and 'internationalist' Social Democrats in the cities, the more nationalist of the socialist parties, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Hai Haghapoghakan Dasnaktsian*), emerged by the early twentieth century as the only real contender for Armenian loyalties. In 1903 it gained wide support among city dwellers and even peasants in the Caucasus as the principal defender of the Church, whose properties had been requisitioned by the tsarist government.

The outbreak of World War I, however, and the genocide of Armenians in eastern Anatolia, created an entirely new situation. In the spring of 1915, missionaries and diplomats, travellers and victims, reported that the Turkish military was systematically murdering adult

male Armenians and forcibly deporting hundreds of thousands of others. Although the exact numbers of those killed or deported may never be known, estimates run from 600,000 to 2,500,000 Armenian deaths in the years 1915–1922. Whatever the exact dimensions of the genocide, Armenians suffered a demographic disaster that shifted the centre of the Armenian population from the heartland of historic Armenia to the relatively safer eastern regions held by the Russians. Tens of thousands of refugees fled to the Caucasus with the retreating Russian armies, and the cities of Baku and Tiflis filled with Armenians from Turkey. Ethnic tensions rose as the new immigrants added to the wartime pressures on the limited resources of the tsar's collapsing empire.

### The Making of Azerbaijan: Islam or Nation?

The demographically dominant people in eastern Transcaucasia were known in the nineteenth century as 'Tatars', but by the late 1930s the ethnym 'Azerbaijani' (*azerbayjanlı*), favoured by the national leaders, was universally adopted.<sup>18</sup> In ancient and early medieval times eastern Transcaucasia was populated by Iranian-speakers, some nomadic Turkic tribes, and the Caucasian Albanians—a little-known people who converted to Christianity in the fourth century and came under the cultural influence of the Armenians. After Arab incursions in the seventh century, Islamic polities were established under local rulers called 'Shahvanshab'. The Seljuk invasions in the eleventh century changed the composition of the local population and resulted in the linguistic dominance of Oghuz Turkic dialects. But unlike the Ottoman Turks who came to dominate Anatolia, the Caucasian Muslims of Azerbaijan in the early sixteenth century became Shi'i, rather than Sunni, Muslims, and continued to develop under Persian social and cultural influence. No specifically Azerbaijani state existed before 1918, and rather than perceiving themselves as part of a continuous national tradition, like the Georgians and Armenians, the Muslims of Transcaucasia saw themselves as part of the larger Muslim world, the *umma*.

After being annexed in a series of wars to the Russian Empire, the Azerbaijani Turks of Caucasasia were separated from their linguistic and religious compatriots who remained in Iran. Azerbaijanis in both Iran and Russia remained a largely extra-urban population, though a small merchant class and working class grew up on both sides of the border. As Baku became the major source of oil for Russia, tens of thousands of Iranian workers streamed to the Apsheron peninsula in search of employment, and Russian economic and political influence could be felt in both parts of Azerbaijan. As the source of employment and the home of the nascent Azerbaijani intelligentsia and revolutionary movement, Baku radiated its influence in Iranian Azerbaijan as well as north of the Arax River.

Referred to as *temnye* (dark) by the urban Christians, and often considered to be an unenlightened, benighted people by members of

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<sup>18</sup> From the ancient name for eastern Transcaucasia, *Atropatene*, came the Persian form *Ader-badagan*, the Armenian *Airpatakan*, and the Arab *Aderbayjan* or *Azerbaijan*, which meant 'the land of fire', a reference to the fire temples fed by underground sources of natural gas and oil.

educated society, the migrant Muslim villagers found themselves in a town dominated by Russians and Armenians. Their sense of inferiority and of victimization at the hands of the Christian overlords and bourgeoisie in Transcaucasia kept them apart from the non-Muslim population. The town of Baku, which until 1902 produced as much oil as the whole of the United States, was complexly segregated, with Russians and Armenians in the central part of the town, and Muslims clustered in distinct districts. As social resentments festered, particularly in times of political uncertainty, ethno-religious differences defined the battle lines in bloody clashes between Azerbaijanis and local Armenians both in 1905 and 1918.

Within the working class, the Muslims, both local and those who migrated from Persia to work in the oil fields, occupied the lowest and least-skilled positions. A hierarchy of skills, education and wages began with Muslims on the bottom, Armenians and Russians in the middle, and Christians and Europeans at the top. Social status and ethnicity overlapped one another in complex ways. Nationality reinforced class, and vice versa. Poor Muslim workers developed resentments against skilled workers and employers, most of whom were Christians. Armenians and Russians were either blind to the concerns of Muslims, or condescending in their behaviour. By virtue of property holdings and a legal quota on Muslim representation, the Baku city *duma* remained in the hands of wealthy Armenians and Russians.<sup>19</sup>

Incorporation into the Russian Empire provided a new outlet for educated Azerbaijanis, some of whom turned from their religious upbringing to a more secular outlook. Representative of the early scholars and publicists who began the study of the Azeri language were Abbas Qoli Agha Bakikhanov (1794–1846), who wrote histories of the region, and Mirza Fath 'Ali Akhundzada (Akhundov, 1812–1878), author of the first Azeri plays. Though eventually these figures would be incorporated into a national narrative as predecessors of the Turkic revival, a variety of conflicting impulses stimulated early Azerbaijani intellectuals. Akhundzada, for example, 'epitomized the contradictions inherent in the uncertain identity of an Azerbaijani of his time: a tsarist official of impeccable loyalty, he described himself as "almost Persian", and his philosophical writings reveal the depth of his preoccupation with all things Persian, both good and bad... Nor was he devoid of typically Persian anti-Ottoman sentiments.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> R.G. Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917–1918. Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution*, Princeton 1972, p. 14. The dominant groups among the Azerbaijanis were the landlords and the Muslim clergy. The Russian government recognized the Muslim landlords as nobles and sanctioned their rights to the land, and their hegemony over both Muslim and Armenian peasants. Immediately after the Russian conquest the properties of the mosques were seized, and clerics faced impoverishment. The Muslim judges (*qadis*) were brought under state supervision—as both the Georgian Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches had been—and gradually Russian laws displaced Muslim law, as they had Georgian and the remnants of Armenian law. While most of the largest industrialists were European, Armenian, or Russian, Muslim merchants made up the largest number of small shopkeepers and tradespeople in Baku. (Audrey Altschuld-Mirhadi, 'The Azerbaijani Turkish Community of Baku before World War I', Ph.D. dissertation in History, University of Chicago, 1983, pp. 18–19, 27–30, 47–9, 175–83.)

<sup>20</sup> Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*, Cambridge 1985, p. 24.

Low literacy, inadequate schooling, and poverty among Azerbaijanis slowed the development of a Turkic intelligentsia; but individuals, often with Russian education, flirted with the intellectual trends of the time—socialism, liberalism, Pan-Turkism, Pan-Islam. The more radical among them joined the Russian socialist movement. No single coherent ideology or movement contained the Azerbaijani intellectuals, though by 1905 a growing number adopted the programme of 'Ali bay Huseynzade: 'Turkify, Islamicize, Europeanize' (*Turklashtirmek, Islamlashtirmek, Avrupalashtirmek*).

The centre of Azerbaijani intellectual and political life, Baku, was not a city that Muslims controlled in any sense, but rather a dynamic multinational city in which a powerful labour movement challenged the hold of the oil industrialists over the population. Led by Russians and working closely with Marxist intellectuals, the workers won significant concessions from the owners, including the first general labour contract in the Russian Empire. Azerbaijanis remained on the fringe of the labour movement, indifferent to, or ignorant of, the aspirations of both their socialist and nationalist intellectuals. None of the small parties and political groups that arose after 1905 commanded much of a following beyond the intelligentsia. At the same time, however, anxiety about the Armenian 'threat', a perception of their distance from and hostility to this privileged element within their midst, and a feeling that Azerbaijanis were connected in important ways to other Muslims, particularly Turks, became part of an Azerbaijani sense of self.

### The Revolutions of 1917–1921

For all three Transcaucasian nationalities, the first year of the Russian Revolution was a period in which social issues articulated in a language of class overwhelmed specifically ethnic concerns. Baku oil workers drew together in a coordinated movement to pressure the industrialists to raise their wages, and when persuasion failed they launched a victorious industry-wide strike. Although ethnic tensions appeared in the newly elected municipal дума in Tiflis as Georgians replaced the formerly hegemonic Armenian middle class, they were contained within a political framework that promised democratic solutions to these perennial problems. Traumatized by the mass killings and deportations in Turkey, the Armenians maintained their separate national agenda, hoping that constitutional reforms would grant them a degree of autonomy and self-rule within a democratic Russia.

But with the Bolshevik victory in Petrograd and the removal of Russian troops from the Caucasian front, ethnicity began to define the lines of conflict. The danger of a Turkish invasion threatened some nationalities (the Armenians and Georgians) and was seen as an opportunity by others (the Azerbaijanis). When Russian troops 'voted with their feet' at the end of 1917 and abandoned the Caucasus, Armenian volunteer military units, which had fought on the Caucasian Front since late 1914, found that they possessed one of the most powerful military forces in the region. For Armenians the principal source of danger came from their ethnic and religious enemies, the Ottoman Turks and the Azerbaijanis, and the very acuteness of that danger completed what two decades of revolutionary propaganda had been

working to accomplish—the effective mobilization of the Caucasian Armenian population to vote for and fight for the national future as defined by the Dashnaksutun.

In the October Revolution the Georgian Mensheviks acted swiftly to disarm the Russian garrison in Tiflis and establish local soviet power. Refusing to recognize the Bolshevik government in Petrograd, the Transcaucasian socialist parties (with the exception of the local Bolsheviks) gradually separated the region from the rest of Russia. A brief experiment in Transcaucasian autonomy (February to April 1918) was followed by an even briefer one in an independent federative republic of Transcaucasia (April to May), and finally three separate independent republics (May 1918 to 1920–21).

Choices had to be made between siding with Soviet Russia, the Entente, or the Germans, and each national leadership chose a different path. The central political issue became self-defence, and in the context of Russian retreat and Turkish-German advance it quickly took on an ethnic dimension. Certainly the most viable and stable state in Transcaucasia was Georgia. Here Social Democracy was well-grounded both in the working class and the peasantry. German intervention was needed, not to shore up the regime internally but to prevent attack from outside. By late May 1918 the Georgians opted for the Germans rather than the Bolsheviks; the Azerbaijanis turned expectantly toward the Turks; the multinational city of Baku opted for Soviet power; and the Armenians were left to face the invading Ottoman armies.<sup>22</sup>

Ironically, the Georgian nation-state was formed and led by Marxists whose expectation had been of a democratic revolution in Russia that would have solved at one sweep the ethnic and social oppression experienced by their people. Instead they found themselves at the head of an independent 'bourgeois' state, the managers of the 'democratic revolution' in one small country, called upon to fulfil the national programme of parties far to the right of them. Unquestionably they had excellent chances for success: the Mensheviks were supported by the great majority of the Georgian people, and managed for over two-and-a-half years to preserve a pluralistic democracy. For European social democrats, like Karl Kautsky and Ramsay MacDonald, Menshevik Georgia was a model of a democracy surviving in a revolution. But by 1920 a powerful group within the Bolshevik Party pushed for an uprising within Georgia, to be followed by an invasion by the Red Army. Lenin was initially opposed to this cynical disregard for the evident influence of the Georgian Social Democrats, but he backed down before the *fait accompli* engineered by Orjonikidze and Stalin.

The only realistic hope for an ethnic Armenian homeland in the post-genocide period was the small enclave around Erevan, which in May 1918 became the centre of a fragile independent republic. Armenian political leaders had not been anxious to attempt independence, but once forced to take control of their refugee population, they alone of the Transcaucasian peoples turned to the Entente for support. The

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<sup>22</sup> The best account of Transcaucasian politics during the Revolution and Civil War remains Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917–1921)*, New York 1951.

Dashnaksutun became the representative of all classes of Caucasian Armenians as they faced together the common threat from Ottoman and post-Ottoman Turks. The Dashnaksutun's ostensibly socialist ideology was muted, and reluctantly-independent Armenia, a tiny enclave of migrants, refugees and local people, attempted to provide a last refuge for Armenians. Here too a democratic system was maintained, but the ruling party hoped to use its base in the Caucasus to create a larger Armenian state in western Armenia from which Armenians had been extirpated by the Turks. Dependent for its survival on the good will and material aid of the Entente powers, the Republic of Armenia awaited in vain the fulfilment of the promises of Wilson and Lloyd George.<sup>22</sup>

Azerbaijani political activists participated in the revival of Muslim organizations in the first year of the Revolution, travelling to congresses and issuing manifestos, but in Baku the centre of political gravity was held by Russian Social Democrats and Armenian nationalists (the Dashnaks in particular). Soviet power in 1917-18 was identified in Azerbaijani eyes with the Christians, and the city soviet in Baku met indifference or active resistance when it attempted to extend its power over the surrounding countryside or the Azerbaijani town of Gandja (Elisavetpol).

The Baku Commune, a Soviet government that ruled Baku from April to late July 1918, failed in its attempt to rally the peoples of Transcaucasia around Soviet power. After crushing a Muslim revolt in the city, the Bolshevik-led government, with its small Red Guard, was forced to rely on Armenian troops led by Dashnak officers. The Azerbaijani nationalist leaders, who had been largely pro-Russian in the prewar years, welcomed the leverage and support offered by the advancing Ottoman Turkish army. The nationalist leaders, located in Gandja, entered Baku with the Ottoman troops, and Azerbaijanis took their revenge on the local Armenians (September 1918), killing between nine and thirty thousand.

But even as they secured control over the city that was to become their capital, the Azerbaijani nationalists were faced by a mixed population of Russian, Armenian and Muslim workers who had undergone a long socialist trade-unionist education. Among the peasantry on whom they depended, national consciousness was still largely absent, and the nationalists were never fully secure in Baku where Bolshevism had deep roots. When the Red Army marched into the city in April 1920 there was little resistance. As Tadeusz Swietochowski writes in a recent study of Azerbaijani national identity: 'While the intelligentsia experienced an evolution that took it in quick succession from Pan-Islamism to Turkism to Azerbaijanism, the masses remained on the level of *'umma* consciousness with its typical indifference to secular power, foreign or native. The idea of an Azerbaijani nation-state did not take root among the majority of the population; the very term

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<sup>22</sup> The definitive history of the Armenian republic is likely to be the ongoing series of works by Richard G. Hovannissian *Armenia on the Road to Independence*, 1918, Berkeley 1967; *The Republic of Armenia, I and II*, Berkeley 1971, 1982. See also Akaby Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915-1923*, London 1984.

*nationalism* was either not understood by them or, worse, it rang with the sound of a term of abuse, a fact the Communists exploited in their propaganda against the Azerbaijani republic. This might help explain why the overthrow of the republic was amazingly easy. Even those who subsequently rebelled against Soviet rule did not fight for the restoration of the fallen regime.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the Armenians and Georgians, Azerbaijanis did not create a mass political movement under an effective leadership until well after the Revolution and Civil War.

### 'Making of Nations' Soviet-Style

Before the great sweep of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, nationalism was for most nationalities in the Russian Empire a phenomenon still largely centred in the ethnic intelligentsia, among students and the lower middle classes of the towns, with at best a fleeting following among broader strata. Among Azerbaijanis, rather than a sense of nationality, the paramount identification was with people nearby with whom one shared social and religious communality. Neither nationalism nor socialism was able to mobilize large numbers of Azerbaijanis into the political struggles that would decide their future. For Georgians, an ethno-socialism as presented by the dominant intellectual elite (the Mensheviks) answered the grievances of both social and ethnic inferiority, and promised a socio-political solution to the dual oppression determined by class and nationality. For the Armenians—a rather unique case of a people divided between two empires, without a secure area of concentration, and faced by the imminent danger of extermination—a nationalism that vertically integrated all Armenians, wherever they might be found, overwhelmed all ideological competitors whether from the left or right. For all three peoples, the most successful appeals were those that combined populist or even socialist programmes with ethnic arguments.

The Transcaucasian experience demonstrates how social identities long remained ambiguous, or at least not fully articulated, until they were solidified—however briefly—in political confrontations. Whatever the influence of social structures and intellectual intervention, the making of nationality and the spread of nationalism also involved particular political conjunctures when people were forced to make less ambiguous choices about their friends and enemies than they had in the past. Among Georgians and Azerbaijanis secular nationalism had been relatively weak before 1918, but the years of independence, the ascendancy of a more nationalist discourse among their intelligentsias, and involuntary Sovietization all contributed to a heightening of secular nationalist sentiments.

None of the major Transcaucasian political movements was separatist before 1918. Rather, they responded to the long-established trade patterns and complex economic relations that tied most of the non-Russian peoples of the old empire to the centre (Finns and Poles are perhaps an exception here). Non-Russians, particularly intellectuals

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<sup>23</sup> Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920*, p. 193

and the urban upper and middle classes, were well integrated into Russian society. For Caucasians the road to Europe and enlightenment, to modern life and self-awareness, lay through Russia. Separation from Russia was for all three peoples a desperate political decision based on the need for support from an outside power—from Germany for the Georgians, Turkey for the Azerbaijanis, later the Entente powers for the Armenians.

In the nationalist discourses of the present movements for self-determination in the Soviet Union, the long experience with Soviet rule is very often depicted as the destruction of the national. Repression and forced Russification, imposed modernization and the suppression of national traditions, the destruction of the village, even an assault on nature, are combined into a powerful series of images that show Soviet power as the enemy of the nation. Lost in this powerful nationalist rhetoric is any sense of the degree to which the long and difficult years of Communist Party rule actually continued the 'making of nations' of the pre-revolutionary period. Not without its own contradictions and paradoxes, the Soviet experience resulted in stronger, more coherent and conscious nationalities than entered the federation at its inception. The Soviet Union, ironically, is the victim not only of its negative effects on the non-Russian peoples, but of its own 'progressive' contribution to the process of 'nation-building'.

The formation of the Soviet Union was both a process of forcibly reintegrating parts of the Russian Empire and a recognition by the victorious Bolsheviks of the provisional power of nationalism. Lenin was insistent that national political and cultural autonomy for non-Russians be established in the new federal state, but that at the same time all parts of that state be dominated by the Communist Party. The Soviet Union was the first state in history to be formed of ethnic political units, a pseudo-federal union that both eliminated political sovereignty for the nationalities while guaranteeing them territorial identity, educational and cultural institutions in their own language, and the promotion of native cadres into positions of power. The policy of 'nativization' (*korenizatsiya*), encouraged by Lenin and supported by Stalin until the early 1930s, established alphabets for peoples who had no writing, opened schools for those who had none under tsarism, and set up hundreds of national soviets for peoples living outside their national region. Steadily Russian officials were replaced by national leaders, and the 1920s witnessed the growth of 'national communisms' in many republics. In Armenia the Communists spoke of the resurrection of Armenia from the ashes of genocide, and while they drove out or arrested the anti-Bolshevik nationalists, they began the rebuilding of an Armenian state to which refugees from other parts of the Soviet Union and the world could migrate. The cosmopolitan capitals of Georgia and Azerbaijan now became the seats of power of native Communists, and the infrastructures of national states, complete with national operas, national academies of science, national film studios, were built up.

Migration strengthened the titular nationalities in each republic,



consolidating the identity of ethnicity with territory. In the pre-revolutionary centuries Transcaucasia had been a region of high mobility, with tribes and peoples moving constantly from one area to another. After the Russo-Persian and Russo-Turkish wars, Muslims left for the empires to the south, and Armenians migrated north into Erevan province, to Tiflis and Baku. The population of towns was mixed, with Armenians being the most urbanized of the three peoples; but in the Soviet period high rates of urbanization led to solid majorities of Azerbaijanis in Baku and Georgians in Tiflis. Yet even as ethnic consolidation grew, anomalous enclaves of ethnic minorities remained: in Mountainous Karabakh, an autonomous region in Azerbaijan, over three-quarters of the population were Armenian; in Abkhazia, an autonomous republic in Georgia, the Abkhaz minority was threatened by the growing Georgian plurality. Dozens of Azerbaijani villages remained in Georgia and Armenia, while Armenian and Georgian villages could be found in Azerbaijan. The territorialization of ethnicity, and the increased power of the titular nationality, left these minorities with few guarantees and means of redress for accumulating grievances.

The process of nativization, both positive and negative, was challenged by the Soviet programme of economic development and social modernization. Once Stalin had consolidated his autocratic powers by the mid 1930s, ethnic interests were radically subordinated to considerations of economic efficiency and productivity. The campaigns to introduce collective Soviet agriculture, resisted by hundreds of thousands of peasants, were in the non-Russian areas a devastating blow to the traditionally patriarchal village leaderships, and they coincided with attacks on the Church and the Mosque. In Azerbaijan women were compelled to give up the veil. In Armenia the head of the national Church was murdered. The industrialization of Transcaucasia resulted in social and geographical mobility that further broke up traditional patterns of authority and cultural practices. Education was nationalized but also secularized, and the old elites were eliminated in favour of the Communists and their allies. Those among the secular intelligentsia and native Marxists who survived Stalin's purges were well integrated into the Soviet system, and presented no real threat to the existing power structure. A Soviet Marxist discourse replaced the prohibited nationalist discourses, and the lines were blurred between Soviet and Russian culture. By the end of the 1930s Russian-language study was compulsory in all schools. Though native languages were also taught, they were often seen as insufficient for successful careers in politics or science.

Despite the modifications in the nativization policies of the 1920s, and the promotion of Russian language and culture under Stalin, the demographic and cultural developments set in motion by *korenizatsiia* continued and by the 1960s had largely achieved their goals in Transcaucasia. The republics had become national in character, not only demographically, but politically and culturally as well. What have been, in effect, 'affirmative action programmes' promoted cadres from the titular nationalities, often to the detriment of the more urbanized and educated Russian (and in Azerbaijan and Georgia,

Armenian) population.<sup>24</sup> Territorial nations had been formed, but without their own full political expression. What Tom Nairn calls a 'Reservation culture' had been established: ethnolinguistic culture without political nationalism was the only permissible, 'healthy' nationhood.<sup>25</sup>

### The Legacies of Stalinism

With the end of the police regime of Stalin, the loosening of central control under Khrushchev, and the easing of the extraordinary restrictions on ethnic expression, the national political elites in each republic began to exercise greater power and a limited independence from Moscow. In Transcaucasia local Party elites created a corrupt system of patronage, favouritism toward the titular nationality, and a widespread practice of bribe-taking and payoffs.<sup>26</sup> With the rise of complex networks of patrons and clients, 'family circles', and the notorious 'second economy', Party leaders, like Veli Akhundov in Azerbaijan, Anton Kochinian in Armenia, and Vasilii Mzhavanadze in Georgia—men who had enjoyed Khrushchev's favour—became enmeshed in the corruption and favouritism that characterized normal Transcaucasian political and economic practices. Their tenures were marked by extraordinary longevity. Mzhavanadze was first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party for nineteen years (1953–72). Kochinian had served as chairman of the Council of Ministers of Armenia (1952–66) before being tapped by Brezhnev to be first secretary (1966–74). Akhundov had succeeded Imam Mustafaev (1954–59), who had been ousted for corruption and national 'isolationism', and spent ten years as first secretary of the Azerbaijani Party. The longevity of these national leaderships had by the early 1970s led to consolidated local elites which placated the local populations with moderate concessions to national feelings and a high degree of economic permissiveness.

By the end of the 1960s, the Brezhnev regime, which in general

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<sup>24</sup> In Georgia, for example, the Communist Party was 76.1 per cent Georgian in membership in 1970, though in that year Georgians made up only 66.8 per cent of the republic's population. Armenians made up 9.7 per cent of the population but only 8 per cent of Party membership, while Russians were 8.3 per cent of the population and 5.5 per cent of the Party. (*Kommunisticheskaia partiia Gruzii v tsifrakh [1921–1970]* Sbornik statisticheskikh materialov, Tbilisi 1971, p. 263; J.A. Newth, 'The 1970 Soviet Census', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, October 1972, p. 215.) At the same time, ethnic Georgians accounted for 82.6 per cent of the students in higher education in the republic, while Russians made up only 6.8 per cent and Armenians 3.6 per cent (Richard B. Dobson, 'Georgia and the Georgians', in Zev Katz, ed., *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities*, New York 1975, p. 177).

<sup>25</sup> Tom Nairn, 'Beyond Big Brother', *The New Statesman & Society*, III, 105, 15 June 1990, p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> From 1954 to 1973 Armenia's Communist Party had both first and second secretaries who were Armenian. Of the Union republics only Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Estonia (to 1971) also enjoyed this privilege. All other republics had a native first secretary and a Russian or other Slav as second secretary. Georgia lost its native second secretary in 1956, Azerbaijan in 1957. 'The diarchy of native first secretary and Russian second secretary in charge of cadres is now the norm', wrote John H. Miller in 1977. 'This is not the same as a strengthening of Russian control, but represents rather the strengthening of institutional procedures, in an area, where, before 1953, equivalent functions would have been performed by the security policy' ('Cadres Policy in Nationality Areas—Recruitment of CPSU First and Second Secretaries in Non-Russian Republics of the USSR', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1, January 1977, p. 35.)

backed the entrenched Party cadres, could no longer tolerate the continued frustration of its economic plans. In order to break through the complex networks of friends, clients and relatives that local Party bosses had erected, the Central Party leaders turned to new personnel outside the dominant Party apparatuses. On 14 July 1969, Heidar Aliiev, a career KGB officer, was selected as first secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party. Three years later, in September 1972, his colleague in the Georgian security forces, Eduard Shevardnadze, was named leader of the Georgian Party. That same year, Russians were brought into Armenia to serve as second secretary of the Central Committee and head of the KGB; and in November 1974, Karen Demirchian, a young Armenian engineer educated outside of Armenia, became Party chief in Armenia. The mandate given these men was the same: to end economic and political corruption, to stimulate economic growth, to end ethnic favouritism and contain the more overt expressions of local nationalism, and to promote a new governing elite able to carry out the policies of the Communist Party.

Because of the traditional Caucasian reliance on close ties with family and friends, the underground economy and corrupt political practices in Transcaucasia proved to be invulnerable to reform. Since among Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis primary loyalty is centred on kinship groups or intimate friends, the sense of personal worth stems more from the honour or shame one brings on one's circle than from a successful career or great accumulation of wealth.<sup>27</sup> Favours done or received are the operative currency of both social and political relations, and the networks built up through favours and personal ties make it possible to circumvent the official state economy and legal forms of political behaviour. So powerful are the obligations to one's relatives and friends that the shame incurred by non-fulfilment is, for most Caucasians, much more serious than the penalties imposed by law. Since the political and police structures have also been penetrated by such personal networks, protection from punishment was a frequent favour, and non-compliance with the law held fewer risks before the 1970s than did breaking family codes. Even after the state came down hard on the 'second economy', and the risks involved in circumventing the law increased, the networks persisted—an effective form of national resistance against the ways of doing business imposed by the Soviet polity. Once Stalinist terror was reduced—and in the absence of effective democratic control from below—the Transcaucasian republics were essentially ruled by national 'mafias' that were centred within the Communist parties and state apparatuses whose reach extended throughout society.

Besides a pervasive 'official nationalism' within the Party and state bureaucracy and sanctioned among the intelligentsia and population, a dissident or 'unorthodox nationalism', expressed by a few human-rights activists and even revolutionary separatists, first appeared in the 1960s, accompanied by counter-nationalisms of the minorities within the republics. 'Official nationalism', or what is defined by

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<sup>27</sup> Gerald Mars and Yochanan Altman, 'The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4, October 1983, p. 549.

Soviet authorities as 'patriotism', became a permissible form of expression in the more *laissez faire* atmosphere of the 1950s–1960s; but central authorities, fearing the growth of ethnic chauvinism or political separatism, periodically tried to rein in the more vocal proponents of local nationalism. With the new regimes of 1969–74, a renewed emphasis was placed on the need for Russian-language education and the curbing of what Shevardnadze called 'national narrow-mindedness and isolation'. State and society struggled over the definition of national rights in the Brezhnev years, and an openly defiant dissident movement risked arrest and exile to express its discontents. As early as March 1956 students in Tbilisi had taken to the streets to protest against the removal of a monument to Stalin and were met by gunfire from the army. In what was more a nationalist gesture than a commitment to Stalinism, dozens were killed. Almost a decade later, on 24 April 1965, thousands of Armenians marched in an unofficial demonstration to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide. Then First Secretary Zakov Zarobian rejected the use of force, tried to calm the crowds, and ultimately made concessions to Armenian national sentiments. A monument to the victims of the massacres and deportations of 1915 was built on a hill in Erevan, Tsitsernakaberd, and each year on 24 April a spontaneous procession of people files up to the eternal flame to lay flowers. But Zarobian, who had achieved considerable popularity in Armenia for his conciliatory attitude toward Armenian national sentiments, was removed from power within a year of the demonstration.

In April 1978 hundreds of students and others in Tbilisi took to the streets to protest against a government plan to change the clause in the Georgian constitution which proclaimed Georgian to be the state language of the republic. Shevardnadze addressed the crowd, estimated at five thousand, before the building of the Council of Ministers, and informed them that he had recommended recognition of Georgian as the state language.<sup>28</sup> Not only was Georgian retained, but similar proposed changes in the constitutions of Armenia and Azerbaijan were prudently abandoned. No Party leaders suffered from this open expression of anti-Russian sentiment—an early manifestation of the re-emergence of civil society in the Soviet Union, and a harbinger of perestroika from below.

'Unorthodox nationalism' included both a small number of revolutionary separatists, like the Armenian National Unity Party, and more moderate intellectuals who formed human-rights organizations, like the short-lived Helsinki Watch Committees that attempted to awaken international public opinion to the denial of national rights within the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> Dissidents in Georgia, for example, at first

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<sup>28</sup> The new article in the Constitution was to have read: 'The Georgian Republic ensures the use of the Georgian language in state and public agencies and in cultural and other institutions and . . . on the basis of equality, ensures the free use in all these agencies and institutions of Russian, as well as other languages used by the population' *Zarys vestnika*, 15 April 1978; in *CDSP*, vol. 30, no. 17, 24 May 1978, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> A full treatment of the Helsinki Watch Committees in Transcaucasia can be found in Yury Slavov Bilinsky and Tibnu Parming, *Helsinki Watch Committees in the Soviet Union: Implications for the Soviet Nationality Question*, Final Report to the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, n.p., 1980. See also Ludmilla Alexeeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights*, Middletown, Conn. 1985.

became interested in the seemingly anodyne pursuit of the preservation of Georgia's historic and religious monuments, but some of the more daring soon took up the plight of the Meskhethians, Muslim Georgians who in 1944 had been forcibly moved to Central Asia from their homes along the border with Turkey and wanted to return. Most were arrested, and by the early 1980s the dissidents had either disappeared underground or been exiled abroad.

### A Test for Perestroika: Struggle over Karabakh

The ethnic consolidation of the titular nationalities, and the empowerment of their national leaderships and intelligentsias, increased pressure on the minorities within the republics to assimilate or migrate. The mass nationalist movements of the late 1980s began here, not primarily as anti-Russian struggles but as more particular conflicts between the Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and later between Abkhaz and Georgians.<sup>30</sup>

An autonomous region now lying entirely within Azerbaijan, Karabakh had through the centuries been a marchland between the Muslims of the plains and the Christians of the mountains. Semi-independent Armenian princes had governed Karabakh (Artsakh to the Armenians) in early modern times; but when Transcaucasia was annexed by the Russian Empire, Karabakh was linked administratively with the richer agricultural plains to the east. After the Revolution, the Bolsheviks promised Karabakh to Armenia, but once again pragmatism prevailed. Given the poverty of Armenia, the relative wealth of oil-rich Azerbaijan, and Soviet reluctance to offend their ally Mustapha Kemal, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous District was established within Azerbaijan. At the same time, another region, Nakhichevan, with a large Armenian minority and physically separated from the rest of Azerbaijan by Armenian territory, was declared an Autonomous Republic (a higher designation) within Azerbaijan.

By 1979 the proportion of Armenians in Karabakh had fallen from about 85 per cent to 75 per cent. Local Armenians, supported by their compatriots in the Armenian republic, claimed that the region was being kept backward by the Azerbaijani government, and that Armenians were being encouraged to emigrate. They feared a fate similar to that of Nakhichevan, where the Armenian population had fallen from nearly half to less than ten per cent in the Soviet period. Both in Karabakh and Armenia proper, activists in the 1960s began to agitate for the incorporation of Karabakh into Armenia, but the central Soviet government repeatedly affirmed that Karabakh would remain part of Azerbaijan. Suddenly, unpredictably, on 13 February 1988 the Karabakh Armenians began a series of demonstrations in favour of incorporation into Armenia. Five days later Gorbachev tried to placate them by offering to hold a special session of the Central Committee to discuss state policy toward the nationalities. The very next day

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<sup>30</sup> On the conflicts between Azerbaijanis and Georgians, see Elizabeth Fuller, 'The Azeris in Georgia and the Ingilos. Ethnic Minorities in the Limelight', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1984, pp. 75-85.

thousands marched in Erevan in support of Karabakh, and an unprecedented ethno-political crisis faced the Kremlin. In a historic move, the Karabakh soviet—usually nothing more than a transmitter of Party policy—voted, 110 to 17, to intercede with the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for the transfer of Karabakh to Armenia.

When the authorities in Moscow hesitated to act and appeared to be confused, the movement grew until, by the last week of February, hundreds of thousands were marching in Erevan in continuous demonstrations. Azerbaijanis, reacting to the Armenian demands, took to the streets. For two days, 28–29 February, rioters in the Azerbaijani industrial town of Sumgait roamed the streets in search of Armenian victims. Buses were stopped and searched; hospitals and apartments were invaded. Before military forces could quell the riots, thirty-one were dead and hundreds beaten. Azerbaijani intellectuals and officials condemned the riots but maintained that Karabakh was historically a part of their homeland. The Gorbachev government was faced with a political crisis for which neither the Soviet Constitution nor political precedent provided much guidance—to settle a violently contested territorial conflict between two Union republics. Both nationalities set out historic claims to the region. Given their demographic majority, Armenians bolstered their claims with arguments based on democratic principles and even Leninist notions of self-determination. Azerbaijanis countered with defences of territorial integrity and constitutionalism.

With Sumgait the first phase of the Karabakh crisis came to an end. The possibility of a peaceful transfer of Karabakh to Armenia now became remote as attitudes on both sides hardened. With a mediated settlement satisfactory to both parties all but utopian, Karabakh was placed under direct rule from Moscow for a year and a half (July 1988 to November 1989). But the fighting only intensified. Powerful national fronts formed both in Armenia (the Karabakh Committee, later the Armenian National Movement [*Haisis Hamaxgain Sbarxham* or *HHSb*]) and Azerbaijan (the Azerbaijan People's Front or APF [*Azerbayjan Kbalg Jabbasl*]). They represented a momentary ascendancy of the power and influence of the national intelligentsias, but in both republics less educated and privileged people began mobilizing. In mid November 1988 mass rallies in Baku protested against what they held to be Armenian encroachments on Azerbaijani authority in Karabakh. Led by a dynamic young worker, Neimat Panakhov, speakers denounced the Communist leadership and the urban intelligentsia. The APF was torn socially and politically between those concerned with the multiple problems facing Azerbaijani society and others who wanted to concentrate on the Karabakh question. The impulse toward democratizing Azerbaijani society faltered on the Karabakh issue, as no important Azerbaijani intellectual or politician would agree to self-determination in Karabakh.

Renewed eruptions of Azerbaijani violence against Armenians broke out at the end of November in Kirovabad and Nakhichevan, areas where Armenians were a minority. The complete breakdown of the inter-ethnic symbiosis in Azerbaijan and Armenia, compounded by

the simultaneous demands for greater autonomy in the Baltic region, led Gorbachev to warn the non-Russians that the future of perestroika was at stake. 'We are one family,' he pleaded, 'we have one common home.'<sup>31</sup> But anger and fear in both Armenia and Azerbaijan could not be overcome with pleas or postponements, and Gorbachev's hesitant and inconsistent policies toward the non-Russian nationalities eroded the sympathy and support he had initially enjoyed. Tens of thousands of Armenian refugees began leaving Azerbaijan for Armenia, and by late 1988 hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis, fearing reprisals, migrated from Armenia. The Azerbaijani refugees, largely migrants from rural Armenia, ended up in Baku and other cities in an inhospitable environment troubled by high unemployment. They were outsiders in their own homeland and very resentful against the Armenians who had pressured them to leave their villages. These unsettled migrants, it was later reported, made up the crowds that savaged the Armenians in Baku in January 1990.

Many of the now homeless Armenians from Azerbaijan settled in Leninakan and Kirovakan, just days before a massive earthquake devastated the second and third largest cities of the republic. As 1988 came to an end, Armenians, stunned by the double tragedy imposed by nature and neighbours, tried to sort out the dismal results of a year of political promises and frustrated hopes. At the same time, Gorbachev and his colleagues, who had seen their triumphal visit to the United States cut short by the devastation in Armenia, were forced to face the most fundamental of Soviet dilemmas—how to democratize and modernize the largest country on the globe while maintaining the last multinational empire.

### The Collapse of the Old Order

Unlike the national struggles in the Soviet Baltic, which have been largely constitutional and free from popular violence, the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over the Karabakh was far more volatile, less manipulable by political authorities, and more subject to rapid and unpredictable escalation. Azerbaijanis remembered the clashes in 1905, and the 'March Days' in Baku in 1918, when Bolsheviks allied with Armenian nationalists to put down a Muslim revolt. They feared Armenian claims to what they hold to be Azerbaijani territory (Karabakh and Nakhichevan) and harboured deep-seated resentments toward Armenians whom they consider to have had unfair advantages over Azerbaijanis. The Azerbaijanis' perception that Armenians are a powerful, influential people close to the centres of Soviet power, who have imperial designs on Azerbaijani territory, were reinforced by the open demands for Karabakh.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *New York Times*, 28 November 1988.

<sup>32</sup> Velayat M. Kuliev, Azerbaijani writer and deputy director of the Azerbaijan Literary Institute in Baku, told a Western journalist that the Armenians 'have better connections', citing journalist Zori Balayan and Abel Aganbegyan, the economist-advisor to Gorbachev. 'Lately the Armenian nationalists, including some quite influential people, have started talking again about "Greater Armenia".' 'It's not just Azerbaijan,' he went on, 'they want to annex parts of Georgia, Iran, and Turkey.' Azerbaijanis have their own claims to Karabakh, says Kuliev. 'There is a town there called Shusha, which

With a different historical and social experience, as a people that suffered genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Turks and the loss of three-quarters of historic Armenia to the Turkish republic, the Armenians were desperate to prevent the loss of 'orphaned' Karabakh. Besides the memory of genocide, they recalled the clashes with Azerbaijanis in 1905, the massacre of Baku Armenians in September 1918 by Azerbaijanis, and the perennial grievances over Karabakh. Displaced from their former positions of dominance in Baku during the years of Soviet rule, Armenians in Azerbaijan managed to maintain positions of relative affluence based on their skills and education. Few Armenians intermarried with Muslims, and many held Azerbaijanis to be a primitive and savage people, barely civilized by the Soviet experience.

By the end of 1989 the nationalist movements had all but displaced the official power structure in the Transcaucasian republics. In Azerbaijan, the People's Front, increasingly hostile to the Communist Party, had in August effectively organized a blockade against the Armenian republic, and initiated strikes and demonstrations to force the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet to declare Azerbaijan a 'sovereign socialist state' within the USSR. By November the Communist Party of Azerbaijan had essentially capitulated to the Front; and in order to stop the blockade and demonstrations, Moscow ended its direct rule over Karabakh and restored the authority of the local soviet (28 November). In other parts of the republic local militants challenged the discredited Communist apparatus. In Lenkoran the nationalists effectively controlled the towns. In December protestors in Nakhichevan tore down border markers and guard posts along the Soviet-Iranian border to 'reunite' 'Southern Azerbaijan' to the Soviet republic, something long desired by Soviet Azerbaijani intellectuals.<sup>32</sup>

Mass rallies called for the separation of Azerbaijan from the USSR; and in Baku in January, groups of extremists broke from a large rally and began massacring Armenians. After a year and a half of trying to avoid direct military intervention, Gorbachev declared a state of emergency in Azerbaijan, and despatched troops, first to Karabakh and then to Baku. Most of the Armenians in the city had either been killed or evacuated by the time the army entered the city. Hundreds of Azerbaijanis were killed, dozens arrested, as the Soviet army in a desperate campaign attempted to restore authority to the discredited Azerbaijani Communist Party.

In Armenia, the post-Demirchian leadership, under Suren Harutiunian, was torn between the Kremlin's refusal to allow the merger of

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<sup>32</sup> (cont.)

is the native land of many Azerbaijani writers and composers. Practically all of the Baku intelligentsia come from Karabakh.' The violence, he concluded, should be blamed on 'inflammatory statements' by Armenians. 'The Armenians have always been the first to start conflicts.' (*New York Times*, 11 March 1988, p. 4.)

<sup>33</sup> David B. Nisaman, *The Soviet Union and Iranian Azerbaijan: The Use of Nationalism for Political Penetration*, Boulder 1987. The response from Iranian Azerbaijanis, who had long suffered from the anti-Azerbaijani policies of both the Pahlavi and Khomeini regimes, was tepid. With schooling in Azeri forbidden for decades, a national consciousness had not developed as it had in the north.



Karabakh with Armenia and the growing popular movement which would be satisfied with nothing less. Frustrated by the Azerbaijani blockade, which halted the rebuilding of the earthquake-damaged towns and villages, and determined to defend their republic and Karabakh, Armenian *fedayees* (a term that recalls the revolutionaries of the turn of the century) raided arsenals and police stations to arm themselves for the coming battles. The government and Party did little to prevent the collapse of order. Buildings were seized by armed men in Erevan, and several independent militias operated on the Azerbaijani frontier. In April 1990 a crowd attempted to storm the KGB building in the capital, and a month later Soviet troops clashed with Armenian irregulars at the Erevan railroad station. Twenty-five were killed. Harutiunian asked to be relieved of his post, and he was replaced by a Party stalwart, V. Movsisian. But as in Azerbaijan, so in Armenia, a vacuum of power continued, with the Communist Party in rapid decline and the popular nationalist forces divided and preparing to contest against the establishment in the coming elections. In July Gorbachev issued an ultimatum demanding that the independent militias of Armenia be disarmed within fifteen days, threatening military intervention if they did not comply. The Armenian parliament elected a president of the republic, Levon Ter Petrosian, who a year and a half earlier had been arrested as a member of the Karabakh Committee. Petrosian's government then set out itself to disarm the independent militias and restore order in Erevan. As Armenians fought Armenians and the new national leadership tried to establish its authority, Armenia formally declared itself a sovereign and independent state (23 August 1990), with Karabakh an integral part of the new Republic of Armenia.

### Georgia on the Road to Independence

In Georgia, the nationalist movement, itself splintered between those favouring independence immediately and those preferring greater autonomy within a renewed Soviet Union, took to the streets in late 1988. Calls for separation from the Soviet Union accompanied a rise in religious feeling and a new respect for the Georgian Orthodox Church. The more militant voices dominated the public discourse, and the government's hesitation in ending the continual demonstrations and hunger strikes in central Tbilisi intoxicated the more radical nationalists. Largely impotent before the growing hostility to its rule, the Communist Party made a near-fatal error when it attempted to reassert its power by crushing a massive pro-independence demonstration on 9 April 1989. Nineteen people were killed by soldiers wielding sharpened shovels and gas grenades. The Party leadership, led by Jumber Patiashvili, fell, and the nationalist movement swelled to become the most powerful voice in Georgian society.

The new Party leader, Givi Gumbaridze, attempted to work with the moderate nationalists, and himself became a spokesman for political pluralism and Georgian sovereignty. When the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow debated creating the office of president for Gorbachev, Gumbaridze openly opposed the proposal, stating that the powers of the president compromised the rights of the Union

republics. The Georgian Supreme Soviet declared the sovietization of the republic in 1921 an illegal act, and called for negotiations on a new treaty with the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> Local elections to Soviet institutions were postponed until the fall of 1990 in order to allow new political parties to organize, and in May the Georgian National Forum, an umbrella organization under which some 150 political groups operate, voted to hold alternative elections to a National Congress, but when elections to the Supreme Soviet were held in the autumn of 1990, the separatist nationalists of the Roundtable, led by former dissident Zviach Gamsakhurdia, won heavily.

As a virulent nationalism grew among Georgians, accompanied by a fierce rhetoric about the territorial integrity of the republic, non-Georgians, particularly the Abkhaz and Ossetin minorities, became anxious about their autonomy. Abkhazians, who ten years earlier had petitioned to join the Russian republic because of their anxiety over Georgian inroads in their autonomous republic, reacted against what they contended was Georgian interference in their national life and Tbilisi's failure to foster Abkhaz cultural and economic progress.<sup>35</sup> A Georgian decision to open a branch of the Georgian University in the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi stimulated a revival of the Abkhaz national movement. In March 1989 they again called for merger with Russia. Armed Georgians clashed with Abkhazians in July, and the Abkhaz issue became a major theme in the pro-independence demonstrations in Tbilisi. In separate incidents Ossetins, a people divided between the Russian and Georgian republics, fought with Georgians after the South Ossetin Popular Front called for unification of the South Ossetin Autonomous Region in Georgia with the North Ossetin Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the RSFSR. Georgian activists travelled to Tskhinvali, the South Ossetin capital, to protest, and only the intervention of Russian MVD troops prevented bloodshed. In yet other areas, Armenians in Akhalsikhe and Akhalkalaki in southern Georgia, and Azerbaijanis in eastern-most Georgia came under pressure from maximalist nationalists who hoped for a 'Georgia for the Georgians'.

### History's Revenge

The 'benign neglect' of the 'national question', which characterized the long years of Brezhnev's stagnant rule, ended with the mass mobilization of non-Russians in 1988. Gorbachev, much criticized as a Russocentric leader insensitive to the demands of ethnic nationalisms, indeed reacted first as an heir to the Bolshevik reduction of the national to the economic. But his forced education proceeded quickly,

<sup>34</sup> For a review of events in Georgia in 1989, see Elizabeth Fuller, 'Georgia', *Report on the USSR*, 1, no. 52, 29 December 1989, pp. 18–19.

<sup>35</sup> *Zerkno vostoka*, 26 May 1978, and 7 June 1978; *New York Times*, 25 June 1978. For more on the conflict in Abkhazia, see Roman Solchanyk and Ann Sheehy, 'Kapitonov on Nationality Relations in Georgia', *Radio Liberty Research*, XL 125/78, 1 June 1978; Ann Sheehy, 'Recent Events in Abkhazia Mirror the Complexities of National Relations in the USSR', *Radio Liberty Research*, XL 141/78, 26 June 1978. The Abkhaz-Georgian conflict differs from the Karabakh issue in that the Abkhaz represent a small minority in their autonomous republic (17 per cent), while the Georgians make up the largest group (43 per cent) (1979 census).

and by 1990 the mass mobilization of non-Russians, as well as the conservative challenge from his own Russian Communists and the Russian nationalists, has led to significant concessions to the republics. A law on secession from the USSR was passed, and although it did not satisfy those who want immediate independence, at least a legal procedure for leaving the federation has been laid down. Negotiations for a new state treaty between the Union republics, which have serially declared themselves sovereign, are proceeding, and the Gorbachev-Yeltsin economic-reform plan is based on a notion of 'sovereign' republics. Still hoping to hold what is left of the Soviet Union together, Gorbachev is prepared to restructure it fundamentally.

The 'national question' is the product of both the successes and failures, the achievements and contradictions of Soviet economic and social development. A state 'socialism' without democracy, and a forced modernization without popular consent, all in the multinational context of political and cultural advancement for non-Russians in their own homelands, has created a conflict between nations and within nations. In each republic some still pull toward a reformed USSR, while others want independence now. Nationalist reformers eye suspiciously Communist conservatives. Gorbachevites in Moscow, and the non-Russian reformers, circle each other trying to find mutual interests. As the Twenty-eighth Party Congress came to an end, the General Secretary confounded the pessimists once again, and held off the conservatives by creating a new Politburo and Central Committee heavily populated by representatives of the republican Communist parties. As he searches for badly needed allies, Gorbachev oversees the end of the Soviet empire and gropes tentatively toward a new, democratic Soviet confederation.

Much of what was (and is) the Soviet project of modernization and industrial development remains the aspiration of the nationalists in the non-Russian republics. There is no Gandhi-like nostalgia for a pre-industrial past, but there is a strong sense that by themselves the non-Russians would have developed (and will develop) their countries differently, in their own way, on their own terms, in their own interests. Indeed they believe that they could (and will) do a better job than the Communists did. The road to modernity no longer runs through Russia, they argue, but directly to the outside world. Yet here too, just as their nations were the creations in part of the Soviet experiment, so too their aspirations are intimately connected to the revolution set off by Gorbachev. The General Secretary's policies, even as they undermined the Stalinist apparatus and called into question the old ways of governing, inspired and legitimized, through the language of decentralization, self-accountability, autonomy and democracy, the projects of the nationalists.

Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians curse the Soviet leader who sent troops to their republic (and, in the case of the first two, refused to settle the Karabakh question in their favour). Each of the Transcaucasian peoples has its own recent tragedy that shapes its view of the world and precludes compromise. Armenians have Sumgait and Baku; Azerbaijanis, the invasion and killings of 'Black January'; and

Georgians, the ninth of April. At this moment their paths seem to diverge; and common interests, such as dealing with the growing ecological crisis and dwindling economic resources, have been drowned in the language of irredenta and mutual recrimination. Few sober voices have been raised to suggest ways to avoid the impending catastrophe.

Armenians are acutely aware of their physical isolation in the Muslim world, their lack of an outlet to the sea, and their dependence on Russian aid and markets. Azerbaijanis imagine advantageous new links to Turkey and Iran, but also know that their traditional reliance on local oil has a short future as supplies dry up. Georgians remain confident about their ability to survive as an independent state, but the abundant fruits, vegetables and tea of 'sunny Georgia' may prove inadequate to offset the losses of raw materials and finished goods that flowed from the rest of the Soviet Union.

Ernest Gellner and Tom Nairn have emphasized that nationalism is a form of self-defence. In a world chronically unevenly developed, with some nations far ahead in the race for resources, those disadvantaged are trying to find their own way to modernity without falling prey to imperial subordination to the big players. The choices are harsh, for the way of the free market is ruthless to the latecomers. On the other hand, Soviet agitators for sovereignty and independence often remind those who warn of economic disaster after separation that first their people must be free, and then they may choose their future relations with their neighbours, the renewed centre, and the capitalist world. How that new freedom will shape the political agendas in Transcaucasia in the 1990s, how the newly empowered social and political forces will realize their programmes, and whether these processes will occur within or outside a renewed Soviet Union, are all subjects for a future study.

The population of the Armenian republic at the end of 1989 was about 3,283,000. Azerbaijan numbered 7,029,000, and Georgia 5,449,000. Fewer than sixteen million people—just under eleven per cent of the whole Soviet population—the peoples of Transcaucasia are actually stronger in number, in their hold over their national territories, in their educational levels and ethno-political consciousness, than they have ever been in their history. Yet they look to the future uncertainly, in large part because as they move ahead they cannot keep from glancing backwards.

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**RECENT  
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## The New Agenda

In the developed late-capitalist societies the reality of class  
as organized power is destroyed on the terrain of class society.

Detlev Claussen<sup>1</sup>

Everyday solidarity is based on the search for open  
communication free of domination. It is, therefore, from the  
first, more comprehensive than workers' solidarity; it  
does not have the latter's constantly re-emerging limitations,  
indeed it even has universalist tendencies.

Rainer Zöll<sup>2</sup>

The socialist movements, and later the socialist parties, developed out of the struggle against the exploitation and oppression of the wage-earning masses, but also against the social goals and conceptions of the bourgeois leading strata. The socialist project of a new society at first contained two elements. On the one hand, there was the claim to leadership by a class of skilled workers, which tested its ability to direct the production process itself in daily practice; it was simultaneously determined to seize power from the class of owners, whom it regarded as parasites and exploiters, in order to place the development of the productive forces at the service of emancipation and human needs. And on the other hand, there was the resistance of a disenfranchised and oppressed proletariat of women, children and men who toiled in workshops and factories at starvation wages, and had to fight for their political and economic rights. These unskilled labouring masses could only achieve the cultural and social perspectives with which to overcome oppression through an alliance with the skilled workers. Equally, the potential

leading class of skilled workers drew, in part, legitimation for its claim to leadership from the unbearable immiseration of the proletarian masses, for whom the elimination of capitalist domination was a question of life and death; however, legitimation was also provided by man's domination of the forces of nature, embodied in the worker—above all in the versatile craft worker. The real subject of this domination was the worker himself, not only as 'global worker', but also as individualized bearer of irreplaceable human capacities and human skills.

Beyond the historicity of the central conflict between labour and capital, however, socialism signified more than its manifest political and social contents: more than emancipation of the disenfranchised, oppressed and exploited; more than just the claim to power of the immediate masters of nature. Resistance and the claim to power of the working class contained a fundamental critique, not only of the capitalist relations of production, but also of capitalist rationality itself, as expressed in commodity, market and competitive relationships.

Actions are economically rational in so far as they aim at the maximization of productivity. But this only becomes possible under two conditions: (1) Productivity has to be separated from the individual singularity of the labourer, and it must be expressed as a calculable and measurable quantity; and (2) The economic goal of the maximization of productivity cannot be subordinated to any non-economic social, cultural or religious goals; it must be possible to pursue it ruthlessly. Only unlimited competition in a free market makes such ruthlessness possible, indeed compels it. Only the 'free market economy' permits economic rationality to make itself independent of the demands of sociality, in which it is embedded in all non-capitalist societies, and to withdraw from society's control—in fact, even to put society at its service.

The socialist workers' movement came into being as the positive negation of capitalist development. Against the principle of the maximization of output, it set the necessary self-limitation of the amount of labour performed by the workers; against the principle of competitive struggle between isolated individuals, it set the principle of solidarity and mutual support, without which self-limitation would be practically impossible. The socialist workers' movement aimed, therefore, to place limits on economic rationality, and ultimately to place them at the service of a humane society.

### The Central Conflict

The central conflict out of which the socialist movement has developed, revolves, then, around the expansion or limitation of the areas in which economic rationality is allowed to evolve unhindered in

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<sup>1</sup> Detlev Clausen, 'Postmoderne Zeiten', in H. L. Kramer and C. Leggewie, eds., *Weg aus Reich der Freiheit*, Berlin 1989, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Rainer Zoll, 'Neuer Individualismus und Alltagssolidarität' in Kramer and Leggewie, p. 185.



market and commodity relationships. It is characteristic of capitalist society that relationships conducive to the realization of capital predominate in conceptions of value, in everyday life and in politics. The socialist movement opposes this with the striving after a society in which the rationality of the maximization of productivity and profit is locked into a total social framework in such a way that it is subordinated to non-quantifiable values and goals, and that economically rational labour no longer plays the principal role in the life of society or of the individual. Socialism, understood as the abolition of economic rationality, assumes, consequently, that this has already fully evolved. Where, in the absence of market and commodity relations, it has not yet established itself, 'socialism' cannot put economic rationality at the service of a social project intended to dissolve it. Where 'socialism' understands itself as the planned development of not-yet-existing economic structures, it necessarily turns into its opposite: it reconstructs a society so that it is devoted to the economic development of capital accumulation. Such a society cannot assert its independence of economic rationality. It is 'economized' through and through.

The central conflict over the extent and limits of economic rationality has lost nothing of its sharpness and historical significance. If one understands socialism as a form of society in which the demands deriving from this rationality are subordinated to social and cultural goals, then socialism remains more relevant than ever. Nevertheless, the concrete historical contents as well as the actors of the central conflict have changed. This used to be conducted, culturally and politically, at the level of workplace struggles; it has gradually spread to other areas of social life. Other kinds of antagonism have been superimposed on the contradiction between living labour and capital, and have relativized it. The striving after emancipation, after free self-development, and to shape one's own life cannot assert itself without trade-union struggles for a reshaping of work and conditions of work, but it also demands actions on other levels and on other fronts, which may be equally important and at times even more so. The question as to the 'subject' that will decide the central conflict, and in practice carry out the socialist transformation, can consequently not be answered by means of traditional class analysis.

In Marxian analysis, the class of skilled workers was destined to rule over a totality of productive forces, so that a totality of human capacities would develop in each worker. The all-round developed individual would consequently be able to make himself the subject of that which he already was; that is, he would resist every external determination, take command of the production process, and set himself the goal of the 'free development of individuality' within and outside productive cooperation. Now unfortunately actual developments have not confirmed these predictions. Although in parts of industry an 'integral adaptation of tasks' (Kern/Schumann) becomes possible or even necessary, there can be no question—even in the case of the new, versatile, skilled production workers—of a totality of skills commanding a totality of productive forces. The integrally adapted task always affects only the manufacture of parts of an end product (for example,

of crank shafts, cylinder heads, gear boxes) or of their assembly and control. As a consequence of its ever greater complexity the total social production process demands a functional specialization of tasks in all areas. Max Weber spoke in this context of *Fachmenschen* (specialized mankind). But specialization always stands in contradiction to the free all-round unfolding of individual capacities, even if it demands initiative, responsibility and personal commitment to the job. A computer specialist, a maintenance worker, a chemicals worker or a postman cannot experience and develop themselves in their work as creative human beings, materially shaping with hand and mind the world experienced through their senses. They can only succeed in doing so outside their professional employment. Specialization—that is, the total social division of labour beyond the level of the individual plant—renders the production process opaque. In the course of their work the operatives can hardly influence at all the decisions which relate to the character, determination, use-value and social utility of the end products. A process worker is in no way different, according to Oskar Negt, from the civil servant in a public body, who is also responsible only for sections of work cycles and for the precise execution of tasks that are placed before him. He makes a contribution to the functioning of areas which as a rule he knows nothing about.<sup>3</sup>

The concept, which appears in Hegel and is then taken over by Marx, according to which labour is the material shaping of the world experienced by the senses, through which man becomes the producer of himself, was still valid seventy years ago for the overwhelming majority of the working class: it was employed in non-formalized activities in which individual know-how, physical strength, planning and self-organization of the sequence of tasks played a decisive role. Today the majority of wage earners work in administration, banks, shops, transport, postal, caring and education services, where individual performance is usually not measurable, and labour has lost its materiality.

The 'modern male and female workers', who now take the place of the former versatile skilled worker, are not in a position, on the basis of their own direct experience of work, to question the meaning and social purpose of production simply by identifying themselves with their work. With 'modern male and female workers', the 'transformation of labour-process power' into a political claim to power can no longer develop, if at all, through an identification with their position in the production process. Rather, starting from the total social relationships of society, it demands a distancing from the experienced work task. Such a capacity is founded on the socialization of male and female workers, because this socialization does not in the first instance pass by way of learning a social role. In addition, professional training develops capacities which are never utilized to the full within labour. This may require a sense of responsibility and independence, but always only to fulfil predetermined functions: it demands 'autonomy within heteronomy'.

However, the capacity to put capitalist relations of production

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<sup>3</sup> Oskar Negt, *Lebendige Arbeit, untergeordnet Zeit*, Frankfurt 1984, p. 188.

fundamentally in question does not, at the same time, automatically incorporate practical possibilities that could lead in this direction. Such possibilities cannot be grasped by the male and female workers as such at the workplace (one thinks of the maintenance specialists in automated plants, of employees in nuclear power stations or in the chemical industry), but only in their capacity as citizen, as consumer, as tenant, or as the user of private and public facilities; here they participate in social relationships outside the workplace and experience themselves as belonging to a much larger community.

### New Cultures of Resistance

It can or should be the task of trade-union work to animate this feeling of an expanded belonging, responsibility and solidarity, and the related distancing from a predetermined professional role. However, the trade-union movement's understanding of itself would have to change. Its task would then no longer consist solely of representing and defending the interests of modern workers as such, but also of giving them the possibility of seeing their professional activity in relationship to an economic and political development determined by the logic of capital realization. This can happen in many forms: through working groups; through public discussions and critical investigations, whose content is the social and political implications of technological innovations and their effect on the environment. What may be advantageous to the employees of one company, writes Hinrich Otjen, may under certain circumstances involve disadvantages or reduced future opportunities for others; and he continues: 'If the trade unions want to remain relevant, then at the very least a public debate on such conflicts of interest should be organized on the spot, because otherwise new movements, in which the workers can draw on their various interests, will be more relevant to them than the trade unions. Up to now, trade-union immobility has frequently given workers cause to set up citizens' initiatives; they capitulate in the face of the trade unions' difficulties in organizing such a dialogue internally.'<sup>4</sup>

At this point it becomes clear: for modern workers, socialist consciousness and the critique of capitalism do not usually have any direct connection with, or derive from, the lived experience of work. The 'subject' of a socialist project of society therefore no longer develops in the capitalist relation of production as class consciousness of the worker as such, but rather in a worker who as a citizen, for example, in his neighbourhood, is deprived of his social and natural lifeworld by the consequences of capitalist development, just as are most of the rest of his fellow human beings. It's very much in this sense that Horst Kern writes that there is no such thing as 'the natural recalcitrance of experience in the face of hegemonic limitations'. It is rather the case that modern workers' critical reflections are set free by the fact that they 'are confronted by the imperfection of the capitalist version of modern life not within, but largely outside, their actual professional roles.'<sup>5</sup> Alain Touraine's thesis may also be valid here.

<sup>4</sup> Hinrich Otjen, *Krise der Gewerkschaften*, 102, Hattingen 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Horst Kern, 'Zur Aktualität des Kampfs um die Arbeit', in Krämer and Leggewie, p. 217.

According to him the central conflict is no longer the antagonism between living labour and capital, but that between the large scientific-technical-bureaucratic apparatuses,<sup>6</sup> which I—following Max Weber and Lewis Mumford—have called the 'bureaucratic-industrial megamachine', and a population which feels itself robbed of the possibility of shaping its own life by a culture of experts, by external determination of its interests, by professional know-alls, and by technological appropriation of the environment. However, nothing should prevent one recognizing the bureaucratic-industrial megamachine and its leading stratum as also the expression of an economic rationality characteristic of capitalism, which takes the shape of industrial growth, the realization of ever larger quantities of capital, the monetarization and professionalization of social and interpersonal relationships.

The inadequacy of an analysis that relies principally on the cultural resistance to the 'colonization of the lifeworld' contained in the 'new social movements', is that these movements do not consciously and concretely attack the domination of the economic rationality embodied in capitalism. These movements are certainly anti-technocratic, that is, directed against the cultural hegemony of the leading stratum of the ruling class, but they only strike at the cultural assumptions and social consequences of the relation of domination, not, however, at their economic-material core. The new social movements will become the bearers of socialist transformation when they ally themselves not only with the 'modern worker' but also with the contemporary equivalent of the disenfranchised, oppressed and immiserated proletariat—that is, with the post-industrial proletariat of the unemployed, occasionally employed, working short-term or part-time, who neither can nor want to identify themselves with their employment or their place in the production process. Estimates, according to which this group is likely to make up 50 per cent of the wage-earning population in the 1990s, are proving by now to be realistic: in West Germany, as well as in France, more than half of the workers newly started in recent years are employed in precarious or part-time jobs. Workers who are employed in this way already constitute in total more than a third of the wage-earning population. Together with the unemployed, that makes a 'post-industrial proletariat' of 40–45 per cent in Great Britain, and in the United States as much as 45–50 per cent. The two-thirds society has already been left behind.<sup>7</sup>

Now it would be a mistake to see in the 40 per cent excluded from normal full-time working relationships only people who long for a full-time job. In its most recent research into the subject of the 35-hour week,<sup>8</sup> the Italian metal-workers' union, Fiom-Cgil, comes to the same conclusion as similar studies in France and West Germany. According to this, we are dealing with a social transformation that is leading to a situation in which work occupies only a modest place in people's lives. Work as wage-labour is losing its centrality, though it

<sup>6</sup> Alain Touraine, *Le Retour de l'acteur*, Paris 1984.

<sup>7</sup> W. Lecher, 'Zum zukünftigen Verhältnis von Erwerbsarbeit und Eigenarbeit aus gewerkschaftlicher Sicht', *WZ Mitteilungen* 3, 1986, p. 256.

<sup>8</sup> According to the report by Bruno Vecchi in *Il Manifesto*, 1 July 1989.

is more a question of a decline of the socialization function of work than of a refusal to work. Work is only desired if it possesses the character of autonomous and creative activity. Otherwise it is viewed solely with respect to the income deriving from it, and for women also as a way of achieving independence from the family.

Rainer Zoll also came to similar conclusions as a result of exhaustive research, with reference above all to young people. He concludes that 'the breaking up of the old identity structures' throws young people back on themselves 'in their search for an identity of their own'. They could never achieve the total, fixed identity that results from traditional family and corporate professional roles, but at best an open one, based on 'self-realization', legitimated by communicative intercourse, but never definitive. The choice of professions potentially available to a young person was greater than ever, but the chances of actually finding what s/he was looking for—namely a job with creative and socially useful aspects in which s/he could realise him/herself—were extremely limited. The number of such workplaces is estimated at 5 per cent. It was therefore understandable that many had already given up the race before it had even begun. The evident consequence of this situation was that individuals transferred the search for self-realization to other terrains.<sup>9</sup> It should therefore be no surprise that, according to an Italian survey already a few years old, young people frequently prefer to take part-time work, to enter precarious or short-term work situations, and to pursue if possible, by turns, a variety of activities; even among university students with limited means, the professional activity most frequently preferred was that which left most time for one's own cultural activities.<sup>10</sup> The impossibility of creating stable, socially useful, and economically rational full-time jobs for almost half of the wage-earning population corresponds, therefore, to the desire of a significant proportion of younger wage-earners not to be tied, either full-time or for life, to a career or professional employment which only very rarely makes use of all personal capacities and cannot be regarded as self-realization.

### Limiting the Sphere of Economic Rationality

Now what connects this post-industrial proletariat of wage-earners, who cannot identify themselves with their position in the productive process, with the 'modern worker'? Both strata experience the fragility of a wage relation based on measurable work performance. It is the case, both for those not working full-time or all the year round, or precariously employed, as it is for the core work forces of 'modern workers', that their effective labour is not constantly required. The first group is needed for limited, usually short-term, foreseeable units of time; the second is needed for situations that are frequently quite unpredictable, which can occur several times a day or only relatively seldom. 'Process workers', maintenance specialists, also firemen or

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<sup>9</sup> Rainer Zoll, *Nicht so wie unsere Eltern?—Ein neues kulturelles Modell?*, Opladen and Wiesbaden 1988.

<sup>10</sup> S. Benvenuto and R. Scatenazzi, 'Verso la fine del Giovanilismo Inchiesta', November–December 1981, p. 72.

caring professionals, must be constantly available, and in an emergency also work twenty hours without a break. They are paid for their availability and not only for their qualifications. They are on duty even when they are not active. In the case of the precariously employed, by contrast, only that time is paid during which they are performing effective work, even though it is of the utmost importance to industry and services that flexible, willing and capable labour is available at short notice. It is for exactly this reason that the demand of the precariously employed—usually less than six months a year—that they also be paid for their availability during interruptions of the wage relation, which are no fault of theirs but advantageous to business, is quite legitimate.

It is therefore a question of uncoupling income and work time, and not income and work itself. This demand is altogether rational, since as a consequence of increases in productivity through technical innovation the total economic production process requires less and less labour. Under these circumstances it is absurd to continue to make the wages paid out by the economy as a whole dependent on the volume of labour performed, and the individual income dependent on individually performed work time. Work time as the basis for the distribution of socially produced wealth is clung to solely for reasons of ideology and political domination. For the post-industrial proletariat that is not employed full-time or all the year round, the wage relation becomes the manifest expression of a relation of dominance whose previous legitimacy derived from the now untenable rationality of the production ethic. The common goal of the 'modern workers' and the post-industrial proletariat is to free themselves from this relation of dominance. However, this goal is pursued by them in very different ways. For the post-industrial proletariat of marginal men and women workers, it is principally a matter of being able to transform the frequent interruptions to their wage-labour relationship into new areas of freedom; that is, to be entitled to periodic unemployment, instead of being condemned to it. For this purpose they need the right to a sufficient basic income which permits new lifestyles and forms of self-activity. For the core work forces of 'modern male and female workers', as for others with full-time jobs, forms of control over working time, such as self-determined flexibility of working hours or even linear reductions in the length of the working week, may seem more attractive.

This may appear to be a new form of the earlier social stratification, with its distinction between skilled workers on the one side and proletariat on the other. As in earlier times, the contemporary proletariat is rebelling principally against the arbitrariness of relations of dominance that express themselves in the absurd compulsion to live from wage labour of which not enough is available; while autonomy within and outside professional life becomes the main desire of 'modern male and female workers'. The divisions between the two strata are consequently much more fluid than they may first appear to be, and could to a great extent be removed. Progressive general reductions in working hours must logically lead to a redistribution of work, whereby the skilled jobs would be made available to a much larger

number of wage earners; and at the same time the right and the possibility of interruptions of the wage-labour relation could apply to everyone. An alliance of both strata does indeed seem feasible, especially on the question of the demand for reduced working hours, provided that such a demand does not become a straitjacket but enhances autonomy within and outside labour.

Reduction in the average annual working time, or even in the quantity of labour performed in the course of four or six years, entitling the wage earner to an uncut income, offers in this respect the greatest scope and possibilities of choice. The 30-hour week, for example, whose achievement the trade unions and left-wing parties of most European countries have set themselves as a goal, corresponds to an annual working time of approximately 1,380 hours, and combined with the right to a sabbatical year, an average of approximately 1,150 hours annually. A society that no longer needs all its labour power full time and all the year round can also easily provide for reductions in working hours, without loss of income, in the form of the right to longer breaks from work. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, journeymen and skilled workers always took this right. Variety, tramping, collecting experiences were for them part of human dignity. Consequently a reduction in working time must be regarded 'not only as a technocratic means to a more just distribution of work', which allows everyone to acquire an indisputable right to their share of social wealth, 'but as the society-transforming goal of procuring more "disposable time" for human beings.'<sup>2</sup> This time may be used however one likes, depending on one's situation in life, to experiment with other lifestyles or a second life outside work. In any case it limits the sphere of economic rationality. It has a socialist significance in so far as it is combined with a social project that puts economic goals at the service of individual and social autonomy.

Jacques Delors has pointed out that forty years ago a twenty-year-old worker had to be prepared to spend a third of his waking life at work. Today his working time only amounts to a fifth of his waking time, and it will shrink further. From the age of fifteen, one spends more time in front of the television today than at work.<sup>3</sup> If a socialist movement does not focus on cultural, interpersonal, community life as intensively as it does on working life, it will not be able to succeed against the capital-realizing leisure and culture industry. It only has a chance if it consciously insists on the creation of expanding free spaces for the development of a many-sided, communicative, everyday culture and everyday solidarity liberated from commodified relations of buying and selling.

The expansion of areas freed from economic calculation and immanent economic necessities cannot mean that a socialist economy or alternative economy is taking the place of the capitalist one. There exists, up till now, no other science of management except the capitalist one. The question is solely to what extent the criteria of economic

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Glotz, 'Die Malaise der Linken', in *Der Spiegel*, no. 51, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Delors, *La France par l'Europe*, Paris 1988, p. 197.

rationality should be subordinated to other types of rationality within and between companies. Capitalist economic rationality aims at the greatest possible efficiency, which is measured by the 'surplus' obtained per unit of circulating and fixed capital. Socialism must be conceived as the binding of capitalist rationality within a democratically planned framework, which should serve the achievement of democratically determined goals, and also, of course, be reflected in the limitation of economic rationality within companies.

Consequently, there can be no question of dictating to public or private companies conditions which make the calculation of real costs and performance impossible, or which are incompatible with initiatives aiming at economic efficiency, and consequently prevent economically rational company management. Reduction in working time cannot, if it is to have general validity—which on the grounds of justice it must have—take place purely at the individual company level and be dependent on a particular company's increases in productivity. The equalization of incomes, together with a general reduction in working hours guaranteed to all, can also not be financed by a general taxation on increases in company productivity (machine tax), but must be guaranteed by indirect taxes, applicable to every European Community country, which are cost-neutral for the businesses. But that is already another chapter.

*Translated by Martin Chalmers*



## *Aporias of Modern Aesthetics*

A garden gnome is no longer a garden gnome. This is the dilemma facing contemporary art, that is circumscribed by the unhappy concept of post-modernity.\* Up until a certain moment (let us take 1969, the year of Adorno's death, as a marker) a garden gnome was still a garden gnome. In the fifties Fritz Bürger could sing of the reappearance of this respected horticultural ornament as a sign that German life had returned to normal:

Throughout the land, wherever you go,  
If you're out for the day or staying at home,  
That lovely little garden gnome,  
Praise God—he's back to say hello!

In those days an author didn't need to be any more explicit about what a garden gnome actually meant; it was self-explanatory. But a garden gnome is no longer merely an object used to advertise one's petty-bourgeois taste. This quality is no longer self-evident now that the ironic appropriation of kitsch has been discovered as a sophisticated and effective means of distancing

oneself from the most advanced forms of aesthetic consciousness. These days one cannot help suspecting a garden gnome of being an ironic quotation, which is particularly perplexing given that a garden gnome in quotation marks is in no way distinguishable from what one might call the real thing. However lovingly you lose yourself in contemplation of these garden midgets, they simply won't give away who (or what) they are.

So what has happened? A border has disappeared that as late as Adorno had the unquestionable status of a metaphysical principle guaranteeing the possibility of art: the border between art and the culture industry, and, simultaneously, between art and non-art. If one and the same garden gnome, as a piece of kitsch, signifies the total aesthetic incompetence of its owner, but as quotation testifies to an artistic sensibility so sophisticated as to be perverse, then—so it appears—the basis for Adorno's aesthetic value-judgements has become deeply problematic.

Theorists of the postmodern like Baudrillard have forced similar observations to the polemical conclusion that 'art has today totally penetrated reality . . . The aestheticization of the world is complete.'<sup>1</sup> In other words, the border between art and reality has vanished as the two collapse into the realm of the universal simulacrum. It does in fact look as though art is in the process of disintegrating into pure exchange value on the one hand (the great auctions at Christie's and Sotheby's keep announcing new records for the price paid for a single painting), and advertising or design on the other. It would, however, be oversimplifying the issues merely to point out that there is more to art than the sale of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* or Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans*. Instead let us treat post-structuralist dramatizations of the situation as a theory of the state of contemporary art, and put their claims to the test.

Imagine that experts proved that the *Sunflowers* recently sold at some dizzying price is not in fact a Van Gogh. The picture would immediately lose most of its value, although the quality of painting wouldn't have altered in the slightest. Thus, even as the object of the most insane speculation, the picture isn't pure exchange value, but is shown to be dependent on the processes of canonization undertaken

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\* This article uses the analyses in my *Praxis der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main 1988) in order to draw some conclusions from the contemporary debate in aesthetics. It was first given as a lecture, organized by Oxford English Limited, in Oxford on 1 June 1990, and subsequently at the conference 'The Concept of Modernity in Aesthetics' at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London on 2 June 1990. The article will be included in Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne, eds., *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics*, ICA, London forthcoming February 1991.

<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'Towards the Vanishing Point of Art', in F. Roetzer and S. Rogenhofer, eds., *Kunst machen? Gespräche und Essays*, Munich 1990, p. 206. See also R.A. Berman who suggests that the postmodern aestheticization of everyday life can actually be traced back to the historical avant-garde movements. ('Konsumgesellschaft. Das Erbe der Avant-garde und die falsche Aufhebung der Ästhetischen Autonomie', in Christa and Peter Bürger, eds., *Postmoderne: Alltag, Allegorie und Avant-garde*, Frankfurt am Main 1987, pp. 56–71, especially p. 68f.)

by the institution of art in the creation of hierarchies, and, above all, on the assumption that only artistic genius is capable of creating values that no other branch of human activity can match.

It is well known that Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* are very similar to Campbell's soup cans. And that's exactly what makes them so perplexing. Here we have a mere duplicate with all the rights of an original. The subject has cancelled its ability to express itself in a work of art. But it is precisely through this gesture of self-cancellation that it gains an aura which far outshines that of an artistic ego still living off its own powers. At the centre of the institution of art is a subject proving remarkably resistant to the announcement of its death.

### The Dialectic of the Boundary

Here we come up against what I want to call the dialectic of the boundary. Borders such as those between art and non-art, or fiction and reality, do not disappear as easily as the theorists of the post-modern suppose. They exist, instead, constantly under the sign of their own disappearance. Adopting Baudrillard's metaphors, one could say that the border resists all attempts to abolish it. It could in fact be credited with all those spiteful qualities Baudrillard attributes to the object of seduction in *Les stratégies fatales*. It is, however, neither the boundary nor the object that is active, but ourselves. Every time the border between art and the everyday is wiped away, we react by reinstating it. Paradoxically, the institution that determines what does or doesn't count as a work of art gains in significance to the degree that works of art and everyday objects become indistinguishable.

The dialectic of the boundary points, in its turn, towards a dialectic of the subject. The subject is not the firm basis for action that it appears to be in the discussions of its disappearance. It is rather the precarious form of potential experience. Caught between an overinsistence on the self and dissolution in the Other, the subject is the ever fragile mediation between the general and the particular. The literature of modernity testifies to the possibility of failure of this mediation. To claim, however, that the subject has now finally retired in favour of an immediacy in which all oppositions are blandly dissolved is merely to invert the Enlightenment's discourse of progress, and replace self-determination as the goal of human history with a state in which all oppositions melt into what Baudrillard calls obscenity. Any such gesture is, of course, still caught within a totalizing thought that resists recognition of the limited range of theorizations of the present, continuing instead to dream those old fantasies of intellectual omnipotence. Even the claim to mediate theory and praxis lives on in such scenarios of impending catastrophe, which ironically hope to promote the very things they describe.

And yet there is a moment of truth in all this talk of the disappearance of art, that applies not just to our times but to aesthetic modernity as a whole. It can only be retrieved by the theoretical labour of tracing the aporia that underlies art in modernity.

## 'The End of Art'

The peculiar nature of artistic production and of works of art no longer fills our highest need. We have got beyond venerating works of art as divine and worshipping them . . . Thought and reflection have spread their wings above fine art . . . In all these respects, art considered in its highest vocation, is a thing of the past.<sup>2</sup>

If aesthetic reflection keeps coming back to Hegel's famous declaration of the end of art, it can hardly be with the intention of reassuring oneself, with Hegel, of the primacy of the concept over aesthetic intuition. Any such argument is immediately contradicted by the fact that the most lively tradition of post-Hegelian thought, which despite all their differences binds Nietzsche, Heidegger and Adorno, decisively rejects Hegel's thesis and places art above the philosophical concept. Since attempts to theorize art in modernity are nevertheless forced to continue glossing Hegel's proposition, one might suppose that it contains more knowledge than can be produced by a reading that stays within the Hegelian system. If we follow up this supposition, we might discover what is genuinely scandalous about Hegelian aesthetics.

Hegel scholars have rightly insisted that the proposition of the end of art by no means implies that after what Hegel calls the dissolution of Romantic art there will be no more art, but rather that art no longer stands in any necessary relation to truth. However, since the relationship to truth forms the core of Hegel's conception of art, a reading that nevertheless really does see the end of art is correct. When all that remains of the 'sensuous appearance of the *Idea*' is the sensuous appearance—which is what Hegel sees in Dutch genre painting (*Aesthetics*, I, p. 599.)—one is no longer talking about art in the strictly Hegelian sense, even if it is still termed art. Moreover, once one has realized that Hegel's concept of art is thoroughly modern in origin (its precondition being the development of idealist aesthetics from Kant and Schiller through to Schelling), the aporia underlying his aesthetics becomes comprehensible. Hegel's systematically developed concept of art as the double unity of the sensible and the intelligible (the *Idea* in its turn being defined as 'the unity of the concept with its reality' [*Aesthetics*, I, p. 143]) only makes sense against a background of the modern experience of alienation. This concept, however, loses its validity for modernity precisely because art is itself dragged into the process of alienation that separates subject and object.

Let us go back over the reasons why Hegel, from the Jena period on, sees 'art in its highest vocation' (that is, as the medium through which the truth of an era comes to expression) as a thing of the past. Modernity is the epoch of the great division between subject and object. Their reconciliation is only possible when mediated by the imagination (in religion) or the concept (in philosophy); art, on the other hand, is characterized by a moment of immediacy:

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<sup>2</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, 2 volumes, Oxford 1975; pp. 21–2. Hereafter cited in the text as *Aesthetics* with volume and page number

For the artist in his production is at the same time a creature of nature, his skill is a *natural* talent; his work is not the pure activity of comprehension which confronts its material entirely and unites itself with it in free thoughts, in pure thinking; on the contrary, the artist, not yet released from his *natural* side is united *directly* with the subject-matter, believes in it, and is identical with it in accordance with his very own self. (*Aesthetics*, I, p. 604.)

Hegel here refers to what Adorno will later call the mimetic moment of artistic production. The artist doesn't treat his subject matter as an object that he must try to conceptualize, but makes himself identical to it. His relation to it is mimetic. But this relation is out of step with modernity because, instead of trying to overcome it by means of the imagination and the concept, it wants to go back to a time before the division.

Attempts to reproduce a Hegelian aesthetics this century have not, as far as I can see, come to terms with the fundamental aporia in Hegel's own text, which develops a general concept of art out of the modern experience of alienation, while simultaneously denying its application to the modern period. They have, instead, tended to hang on to one or other of the two sides of this contradictory whole.

Joachim Ritter and his pupils relinquish any strong concept of art that, like Hegel's, is committed to truth. Ritter illustrates 'the function of the aesthetic in modern society'—as the subtitle to his essay 'Landscape' puts it—with the example of the naturally beautiful (in this respect deviating from Hegel altogether). The ability to represent nature as landscape arises at the same time and to the same degree that it is objectified and consigned to technical use by modern science. Ritter observes that the particular content of each landscape is of only secondary importance when it comes to 'its aesthetic construction', and that aesthetic landscapes, because they are 'essentially without a point of reference', are completely interchangeable. Thus, though he also writes of 'aesthetically mediated truth' in the same context, he cannot actually sustain his use of this concept, defined as it is by its reference to the particular.<sup>3</sup> His pupils have drawn the logical conclusion from this and given any such concept up.<sup>4</sup> The function of art is then limited to compensating for the disenchantment of the world brought about through the modernization process by encouraging the development of 'the agent of a new enchantment'.<sup>5</sup>

Dieter Henrich, whilst recognizing that Hegel's remarks about the art of his time do not correspond to his concept of art, finds too hasty a solution to the aporia by letting 'the limited character of recent art' guarantee the modernity of the Hegelian thesis. In doing so, he robs

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<sup>3</sup> Joachim Ritter, 'Landschaft', in his *Subjektivität*, Frankfurt am Main 1974, pp. 141–90; see especially pp. 157, 183.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, W. Oelmüller's contribution to the discussion in his *Kolloquium Kunst und Philosophie 3: Das Kunstwerk*, Paderborn 1983, p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> See O. Marquard, 'Kunst als Kompensation ihres Endes', in W. Oelmüller, ed., *Kolloquium Kunst und Philosophie 1: Ästhetische Erfahrung*, Paderborn 1981, p. 161. The concept doesn't actually appear in the two essays by J. Ritter that Marquard cites when presenting his compensation thesis; Ritter does use it, however, to describe the function of the humanities. (See *Subjektivität*, p. 131.)

aesthetic modernity of its frequently self-destructive tension, which arises precisely out of its unwillingness to come to terms with its own partiality.<sup>6</sup>

Adorno, on the other hand, held on to Hegel's strong definition of art, and applied it to the products of aesthetic modernity, without taking into account the fact that this is not possible from the point of view of Hegel's theory. Just as for Hegel the significant works of art of the past fully express the spirit of their time (*Don Quixote*, for instance, expresses the passage from medieval to modern times in which social conditions have changed so much that the knight's chivalry becomes lunacy. [*Aesthetics*, I, p. 591.]), so for Adorno Beckett's *Endgame* articulates the truth of late capitalist society as it performs the destruction of all the categories of autonomous thought or action normally attributed to the bourgeois subject. In both cases, the individual work is related to a social totality whose essence it expresses.

### The Impossibility of Modern Art

So, either art of the modern period is no longer the expression of truth, in which case any transhistorical concept of art must be abandoned, leaving us instead with art as a means of compensating for what Max Weber called the world's disenchantment. Or, art remains the medium of truth even in the modern period, which, however, contravenes the thesis that art has run its course, or, to put it another way, ignores the historical shift contained in the concept. If one tries to keep hold of both sides of the Hegelian argument—both a transhistorical concept of art that binds it to the truth, and the declaration of art's demise—art becomes impossible with the onset of modernity. For it is then, paradoxically, simultaneously the expression of truth and incapable of expressing that truth. Furthermore, a concept of aesthetic truth grounded in a mimetic practice contradicts modern concepts of truth that always insist on its mediation. Art is the unity of subject and object, of the intellect and the senses; and yet that is exactly what it cannot be, since alienation is the fundamental condition of modern life. In a word: art, in modernity, is forever coming up against the conditions of its impossibility.

This Hegelian paradox could in fact be read as a formula for art in modernity, in as much as art becomes at once necessary and impossible. It becomes necessary when the individual, released from the bonds of religion, realizes that the world he hoped to mould through his own interventions is already made, and that his project of free action has been reduced to its opposite. He then demands a sphere in which his subjectivity is genuinely able to determine the results of his actions. This sphere is art, with its institutionalization of the concept of symbolic form (or the identity of form and content). The experience underlying the subject's demand for a sphere that allows him to interact with creations that perfectly correlate with the structures of his subjectivity is the same one that determines the

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<sup>6</sup> D. Henrich, 'Kunst und Kunstphilosophie der Gegenwart', in W. Iser, ed., *Immanent Aesthetic. Aesthetische Reflexion*, Munich 1966, pp. 11–32, especially pp. 16, 19.

impossibility of the creations he desires. For the moment when they did totally correspond to his subjectivity, when intellect and senses were perfectly fused with one another, would of necessity be the moment they were exposed as so many testimonies to their own falsity, contradicting the subject's most basic experiences. Put another way, one could say that, left to his own devices, the bourgeois individual experiences himself as a free agent, though in reality his position is controlled economically by the exigencies of capital accumulation, and politically by rivalries between power blocs. The subject that thinks of himself as capable of free action must in reality experience his dependency on processes that are themselves no longer governed by conscious thought. After having freed himself during the Enlightenment from a destiny controlled by otherworldly powers, he is faced once again by a man-made history that appears as a matter of fate over which he has no control. The modern desire for art arises out of this disjuncture. Because the individual does not realize himself in actions in and for society, but only in pursuit of private advantage, he experiences society as an external limit to his actions rather than as something in essence universal. All ends become mere means; the category of the universal, or of meaning, loses all validity. Even the bourgeois subject, however, is incapable of living without any purpose beyond the simple reproduction of physical existence. Thus, as history withdraws as a possible arena for sensuous experience, so art becomes the site of imaginary self-realization. The concept of symbolic form reunites the poles torn apart by the individual's real existence. Yet the modern individual knows this reunification of opposites to be illusory. If he wants to rescue a truth for himself, he must grapple with the separation of subject and object, of self and the world. Thus alienation necessarily penetrates the realm of art and turns the longed-for experience of meaning into the never-ending story of the representation of its absence.

### Infinite Reversals

To engage with the process in which alienation becomes inscribed in art itself, one must trace each of the paths adopted by the various attempts at self-realization. On the one hand, there is the stubborn insistence on the self's power to shape reality (the course first taken by early German Romanticism); on the other, a recognition of the power of the factitious (the course of Realism). Both projects are modern in as much as they are informed by the experience of alienation. Yet this is true to an even greater extent of the movements reacting against Romanticism and Realism in the wake of the failure of the revolutions in 1848, as they rework the aporias inherent in both the Romantic and the Realist projects.

The Romantics take modernity's promise of self-realization at face value. The origin and end of their action is the self. Pitted against the bourgeois obsession with acquisition and the pursuit of purely material ends, the Romantic self hopes to experience itself as a freely acting subject. But the object of its activity is of course not the physical world but the world of words. These lie totally at its disposal, and it seizes with pleasure at the sheer infinity of possible combina-

tions. In this play of concepts, the Romantic subject discovers its own productivity, which can do without the art work because it is a form of life. But this project of nourishing self-realization solely from the resources of the self and of the group fails however; the Romantic subject is confronted instead with its own instability. Discovering that its limitless power over linguistic combinations is simply the obverse of its impotence in the face of reality, it escapes into the bosom of the Catholic Church. All that remains is the insight from which it retreated, that omnipotence and impotence are indistinguishable in the play of a language that has lost its referent.

For the Realist, on the other hand, language is a tool for the unproblematic representation of reality. Yet this undertaking also threatens to turn into its opposite, in a way that the Realist himself, of course, is not aware of. His belief, inspired by a positivist science, that he could grasp the reality of an era, is in fact only the fantasy of taking possession of a world that is totally transparent. This becomes most obvious in a presentation of characters, which allows the figures to be seen from both inside and out, a device whose artificiality a later generation of modernist writers would thoroughly expose: 'These composite beings, simultaneously internal and external, transparent and opaque, proliferated during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth; they are the children of Realism but themselves bare witness to its perfect unreality.'<sup>7</sup>

Literary modernity can be described neither as the sum of its themes and motives, nor as a collection of devices and techniques; it can only be grasped in its entirety as a movement. This movement is twofold. It consists in the subject's constant pursuit of, but constant failure to achieve, self-realization; and in a search for reality that constantly comes up against its own process. Art, in modernity, is thus the site of constant reversals. The omnipotent Romantic self uses language to discover nothing but its own impotence; the work produced by the Realist, with his hunger for reality, reveals a textual reality that is the product of literary technique. The development of this double aporia is simultaneously something the subject grasps about himself and the world, and—this is decisive—something he can only experience in the work itself.

Under the sign of modernity, the world collapses into the torn halves of subject and object. Yet they re-emerge in art not as a stark opposition, but as the incessant mutual inversions of the categories of form and content. In this endless play, in which the categories of form and content are constantly changing their positions, meaning is only present threatened by extinction. The author, whose naive trust in the transparency of his medium makes him think he can simply posit meaning (like the Naturalist with his belief in positivist theories of social environment), discovers instead a conspiracy of detail that turns against the overall intention of the work, foregrounding itself as a surreal allegory. Conversely, the attempt to reduce words to the pure materiality of sound patterns can only show the reader that they still in fact carry meaning.

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<sup>7</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Je - tu - il', in his *Situations* IX, Paris 1972, p. 294.



## The Institution of Art

This play of form and content has its driving force in the discourses that construct the work of art as a work of art. By which I mean not modern art's dependence on explicatory commentary, but something more fundamental: the fact that aesthetic discourse doesn't attach itself to works of art after the fact, but rather makes them possible in the first place. We have works of art because we have the institution. If this weren't the case, we would only have beautiful objects or fetishes.

Attempts to ascertain the principles underlying the institution of art can only reveal its peculiar groundlessness. We saw this in the aporetic construction of Hegel's aesthetics, according to which art is simultaneously necessary and impossible in bourgeois society. Necessary because once religious world-views have lost their validity, people are left looking for a sphere in which they can experience their own actions as meaningful rather than simply expedient. Impossible because the symbolic form in which the longing for meaning comes to fulfilment, is simultaneously known to be untrue, in so far as it contradicts the basic experience of alienation; and also because the artist's mimetic approach is incompatible with modern concepts of truth. Art's contradictory relationship to society is not, however, dialectical. Thus there can be no solution or synthesis, only the endless play of displacements in new guises. Yet it is in and through these guises that we experience the world.

Autonomous art has been accompanied by the consciousness of its own inadequacy since its inception. It is only once its autonomy has been institutionalized that it can stake its claim to truth alongside science and ethics, but its consequent status of 'as if' (what's known as the category of 'aesthetic appearance') robs it of any claim to validity or real purchase. Thus modern art rebels against its status either by construing itself as political, as in Heine's theory of the end of the artistic epoch; or by declaring that the void, which it recognizes itself to be, is the whole purpose, as in Mallarmé's aestheticist dictum that 'the world was made to culminate in a beautiful book.'<sup>8</sup> Politicization or messianic over-extension are the extremes into which modern art must throw itself as soon as it becomes conscious of the constraints dictated by autonomy. And once these positions have been cleared away, all that remains is to attack the institution, a task undertaken by the movements of the historical avant-garde in the wake of the shocking experience of the Great War. Their slogan: revolutionize life by liberating the imagination from the straitjacket of the institution. With violent panache, the Surrealists declare themselves to be above the contradictions of modern life, and announce the possibility of actions in which chance becomes the objective ally of the subject's desire for self-realization.

We know that the project was bound to fail, but that doesn't mean that it has disappeared over the horizon of aesthetic experience. On

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<sup>8</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, eds. H. Mondor and G. Jean-Hubry, Paris 1945, p. 872.

the contrary, since the historical avant-garde, art's self-sublation figures as one of its poles, the other being the self-contained work. Aesthetic experience cannot get beyond an attack on the institution, which, in failing, seems only to reinforce the institution's boundary. The catastrophic scenarios of postmodernity, with their declarations of the imminent end of art, have evidently missed out on an aspect of aesthetic experience continually encountered by artists since the historical avant-garde; namely, that once one is inside the realm of art, there is no escape from it. As with King Midas: everything becomes a work of art. Even the total refusal to produce anything at all is transformed into an aesthetic act. Art, to the outsider, appears as a place of freedom; to the artist, however, it is simultaneously a place of damnation from which there is no escape. No one has described this aspect of the modern artist's predicament as eloquently as Maurice Blanchot.

What these days goes by the name of post-modernism could more accurately be termed a post-avant-garde; in other words, an epoch marked by the failure of the historical avant-garde's attack on the institution of art. This failure shines a penetrating light on the position of art in bourgeois society. Art has, so to speak, outlived the realization of its utopian promise. It now knows what it is. The paradise that the avant-garde wanted to bring down to earth now touches the ground, available to everyone. That's one side of the coin. The other is the survival of a project that is in every respect impossible, but which the individual still attempts. It remains a mystery for theory that people should still write and paint. It has, after all, pointed out the aporias that are contained in such practice. And yet it goes on regardless. Many stake their lives on it. It seems that the only chance of meaningful action in modernity is wholehearted acceptance of meaninglessness. Consistency is conditional upon a readiness to contradict oneself. On the horizon one can discern the figure of Joseph Beuys, who surrendered himself totally to the media, but simultaneously worked on esoteric drawings. The dissolution of art in political agitation is the impossible gesture that must be forever enacted and then retracted. The new life will not come, but reference to it is essential.

*Translated by Ben Morgan*

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## *Different but Not Exceptional: The Feminism of Permeable Fordism*

This article does not take the usual form of a political or academic intervention. It is an essay in intellectual autobiography. Such an effort is, of course, different from the history of ideas—the recounting of ‘debates’ and descriptions of other theorists’ trajectories—which constitutes one of the staples of social-science writing. The task of writing intellectual autobiography, at least for me, was a difficult, even a frightening one. It calls for distance and the need to be ‘self’ reflective—requirements quite different from other sorts of writing. The origins of this for-me-unusual project were as follows. I am a member of the editorial collective of the Canadian journal *Studies in Political Economy*. In the context of discussing a special issue on ‘Feminism and Political Economy’,<sup>1</sup> the members of the journal’s Board began to reflect on the ways in which feminist theory and feminist politics had affected our work, particularly that which did not explicitly speak of gender or make use of obviously feminist conceptualizations. The reflections that follow were prompted by that discussion, but then quickly took on a life of their own.

I sat down to write with a certain sense of righteous indignation. That quickly turned—in the process of thinking in order to write—to reflection on how I actually *had* arrived at the notion of ‘permeable Fordism’ that I had used in studying Canadian political economy. This was not something which I had myself completely understood before undertaking this exercise. So in the end, there was a fair amount of self-discovery involved in what had begun as mere explication. But the final discovery was about the process of writing itself. While there was one story that I could, and did, tell in detail, there were also several others that might have been told. Indeed the major lesson of the whole enterprise has been the reminder of the fragility of both discovery and self-discovery. I am indebted to those of the *SPB* community whose provocation and support pushed me to doing more than I might have done if I did not have to account to them both in person and in my own head.

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<sup>1</sup> This appeared as issue 30 in Autumn 1989, edited by Pat Armstrong and Pat Connelly.

My most recent work on Canada, as almost everything else I have written about my own country, does not pay much attention to women or appear to make use of feminist theory. My essay 'Canada's Permeable Fordism' was about the big questions tackled by the big boys: development strategies, the state, capital and labour, comparative political economy.<sup>2</sup> This contrasts, of course, with some of my writing about European politics, which focuses on gender relations and which explicitly examines the role of women's agency in social movements and as creators and clients of social policies. Someone, observing the bifurcation, might conclude that should I address one set of questions and mobilize one set of concepts for thinking about gender relations, and another set for thinking about Canadian political economy. Yet my response to such an observation is to reject it vehemently.<sup>3</sup>

I will argue here that it would have been impossible to think the concepts of 'permeable Fordism' or 'societal paradigm' as I did if I had not already had a long-standing encounter with feminism and feminist theory. I used the French Regulation approach because it facilitated the integration of that encounter, although I had to develop my own conceptualization of the societal paradigm to do so. The Regulation approach allowed me to show how and why Canada's Fordism—which I labelled 'permeable Fordism'—differed from the models of development constituted after 1945 in other countries of the advanced capitalist world. Secondly, by elaborating the concept of 'societal paradigm' I could argue that part of the difference was due to political practices and meanings—the societal paradigm—organized around a nationalist collective identity embedded in the postwar institutions of federalism.<sup>4</sup>

Two general propositions about political economy followed from thinking about Canada in this way. The first, derived directly from the Regulationists, was that any understanding of a social formation depends upon an analysis that moves back and forth between analytic abstractions like the regime of accumulation or hegemonic bloc, and the historical specificities of social relations institutionalized through struggle over the mode of regulation and the societal paradigm.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> See Jane Jenson, "'Different" but not "Exceptional": Canada's Permeable Fordism', *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1989, pp. 69–94. This article is part of a special issue on Comparative Political Economy, edited by John Myles. See also Jane Jenson, 'Representations in Crisis: The Roots of Canada's Permeable Fordism', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. xxii, no. 4, 1990.

<sup>3</sup> I want to thank John Myles for asking me to explain what feminism had to do with permeable Fordism. My immediate and strong reaction to that question was that they were obviously and intimately linked! His question and my reaction provided the motivation to think through in this essay why everyone else could not 'see' the links.

<sup>4</sup> Actually, in 'Canada's Permeable Fordism' the label is simply 'paradigm', but for various reasons I have decided to modify it with the adjective 'societal'. See Jane Jenson, 'Paradigms and Political Discourse: Protective Legislation in France and the USA before 1914', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. xxii, no. 2, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> See the distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric in Alain Lipietz, *The Enchanted World. Inflation, Crises and the World Crisis*, Verso, London 1985, Chapter 1. On the hegemonic bloc and some thoughts on the societal paradigm, see Alain Lipietz, 'The Construction of an Alternative in France', *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1988.

second proposition was that those specificities were contingent upon a tangle of practices and meanings which constituted a system of representation of collective identities, both in the realm of production through the mode of regulation, and beyond production in the societal paradigm. This second assertion follows directly from my own encounter with feminism; and so my approach to Canadian political economy—that is, the big questions tackled by the big boys—is profoundly shaped by, and is a reflection of that encounter.

I do not want to suggest that I am alone in experiencing this trajectory. Other women and men with a strong political and conceptual commitment to feminism are also rethinking the received ways of doing political economy.<sup>6</sup> This means they are doing more than simply 'adding the women in'. They are also doing something other than studying women, or theorizing patriarchy, or searching for the articulation of sex and class. They are, rather, tackling the implications of one of the oldest institutions of the women's movement, that 'women are made, not born'. A wide reading of this insight compels us to think not only about the social construction of gender relations but also about the ways in which *all* social relations are constructed. This insight, I will argue here, also forces us to develop analytical perspectives that are cognizant of agency in human history, and which are, therefore, empowering. Although I will tell this story from the perspective of my own biography, I do not think it is by any means exceptional.

There are ways, however, in which my story is different, because the women's movement and the feminist theory out of which my own thinking developed owe more—from the beginning—to the controversies of the French Left than to those of Canada. This is a biographical accident, but one which, given the influence of some French feminist thought in North America in the 1980s, is now more widely shared.

### Permeable Fordism and Political Economy

The rationale for developing the concepts of 'permeable Fordism' and the 'societal paradigm' came from a long-standing dissatisfaction with the literature of political economy. Each time I tried to think about Canada with the concepts that political economy developed outside Canada has made available—neo-corporatism, the postwar settlement, class analyses of the welfare state, expectations about the link between industrial development and class politics, for example—the 'facts' did not fit. Therefore, the story of Canada became one which

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<sup>6</sup> I would not want to claim that the *only* way to give attention to the social construction of social relations, agency in history, and democracy is via an encounter with feminism. One can obviously get there by interrogating class theory from the perspective of a socialist project that is democratic and that takes class formation seriously. I do think, however, that contemporary feminism has been the major contributor to encouraging theorizing about the variability possible in the social construction of social relations. For a discussion of some alternative routes, see Jane Jenson, 'All the World's a Stage: Ideas about Political Space and Time', *Studies in Political Economy*, forthcoming June 1991.

stressed the uniqueness of its history and politics told in terms of dependency and underdevelopment, cultural politics overwhelming class politics, brokerage parties without class-divided constituencies, and the centrality of federalism to the whole narrative. All the stuff of progressive postwar social science—the politics of the unions, the rise and fall of class-based voting, the encounter between the Left and the social movements, the elaboration of the Keynesian welfare state—were either invisible in Canada or unconvincingly analysed with reference to the debates that animated political economy and Left politics in Europe. Moving between studies of France and Canada, I sometimes felt if not schizophrenic, at least in two separate worlds.

Nor did the fault lie with Canadian political economy. Federalism *was* crucial to the ways in which the lives of subordinate classes were lived. The Canadian party system *was* one in which the social-democratic party was increasingly drawn into behaving like a brokerage party. The national question *did* organize politics in both Quebec and Canada. The Canadian welfare state *was* a social compromise organized by social-democratic forces in alliance with the union movement. In other words, political economy approaches which took Sweden or Britain as their ideal-typical case did not work well in Canada. But why not?

They did not work because they privileged a single dimension of social difference: the social relations of production. They assumed—to the extent that they addressed class formation—that the central collective identity of industrial capitalism, at least until the late 1960s, derived from the relations of production and was therefore a class identity. From these two assumptions about social relations and collective identity followed deductions about politics, the role of the state, and modes of representation. Moreover, embedded in these two assumptions and the deductions from them were expectations about how the system would change. Most simply, new social relations of production would automatically give rise to new collective identities. Therefore, European political economy could take on board, to explain the 1970s and 1980s, a whole set of arguments about the fragmentation of collective identities, the emergence of postmodernism, the end of the politics of production, and the arrival of the politics of democracy. Disputes raged, of course: over whether class was really irrelevant; what the politics of the new middle classes would be; whether new social movements would transform modes of representation; whether social democracy and/or Western communism and/or trade unionism were dying an inevitable death; whether corporatism could be revised and/or revived; and so forth.

Despite such disputes, however, the literature sometimes seemed beside the point, and not simply because it did not answer my Canadian questions or because it recounted the whole story from the perspective of its central actor, a white male worker whose place in history was now being challenged by women, blacks and immigrants. Very troubling was its lack of attention to the real political work involved in sustaining—for almost a century—the belief among workers and their theorists that the social relations of production were *the*

central social fact, and that therefore actors *should* constitute their collective identity around their experiences at the point of production. That so many workers and intellectuals had done so, and that institutions like parties and trade unions had so successfully formed their class constituencies, was clearly a marvel to a Canadian; yet it seemed strangely unproblematical to many comparative political economists.<sup>7</sup> Comparative political economy did not stress that a widely shared belief in the centrality of production and collective identities constituted by production relations were a measure of the success of a quite particular kind of politics carried by actors in quite specific circumstances. They also missed the implication, therefore, that failed attempts might also exist in history.<sup>8</sup>

Yet just such failed attempts were Canada's lot, and I wanted to know *why*. To do so, I began to think about representation in a double sense. One kind of representation is that which involves actors' *representation of themselves* to others, through the elaboration of their collective identities. A second kind, familiar from the language of liberal democracy, is the *representation of interests*, a process which has meant, since the emergence of the modern state, representation to the state. These two senses of the term are linked in my thinking because they both lie behind the process by which regulation, change, or crisis in social relations occurs. They are also analytically linked by the fact that both senses of representation involve *power*, the power to give meaning to things and thereby to represent the 'interests' of those whose collective identities are recognizable.

In these terms, the emergence of a universalizing class identity in advanced capitalist society was the result of struggle in concrete circumstances. The success of class-based institutions in particular times and places was that of shaping a meaning system which represented class-based collective identities and political interests as coterminous. And it was the consequence of strategies followed by actors struggling to impose their world-view, including their definition of interests, on others. Understanding representation in this way makes the politics of struggles over meaning—the power to label social relations and to thus give them meaning—very important. Politics involves conflict

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<sup>7</sup> The effort to understand this marvel provided the starting point for Janine Brodie and Jane Jenson, *Crisis, Challenge and Change: Perry and Class in Canada Revisited*, Ottawa 1988. This is a revision of a book first published in 1980 which was 'claimed' by the new Canadian political economy only belatedly—in part, I would argue, because of its unfamiliar emphasis on the formation of collective identity and the language of politics.

<sup>8</sup> Political economists have obviously explored parties' and other institutions' role in class formation. Adam Przeworski's work, for example, has been influential in this regard. Yet, while he asserts the centrality of institutions for class formation, his structuralist analysis of the 'electoral dilemma' leaves little space for outcomes based on concrete struggles. Strategy dissolves in the face of the structural dilemma of numbers and the need for allies. See Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, Cambridge 1985. Gosta Esping-Andersen took as the rationale for his solid critique of Przeworski the need to reinsert strategy, and therefore contingency, into the analysis. Nevertheless, working out of the classic tradition of comparative political economy, Esping-Andersen shares its blindness to non-class collective identities. See *Politics Against Markets*, Princeton 1985.



over or acceptance of collective identities as much as it entails conflict among groups and organizations over disputed claims about who gets what, when, and how.

The Regulation approach, then, helped me to see why such situations were not always equally open to new representations, and why struggles would lead to different outcomes in different places. Regulationists, with their conceptions of moments of stability and moments of change, provided a notion of time with which I could begin to talk about change. With the stress on agency, the approach also permitted an understanding of variation across space.<sup>9</sup> With this I could argue that a hegemonic societal paradigm in place implies the existence of a set of interconnected premisses about social relations, institutional roles, and behaviours organizing the processes of societal interest representation. In this way the hegemonic societal paradigm specifies which collective projects will define the boundary of 'the political', which actors will be visible, and which interests will be in play. That a social formation is in crisis means the absence of a hegemonic societal paradigm. Thus, ruptures in the economic or political realms can become moments of profound societal crisis and restructuring if new or reconstituted actors take advantage of the 'space' opened in the universe of political discourse to demonstrate alternative meaning systems and institute alternative practices. Emergent social compromises, then, do not come from technological change, capitalist accumulation, or workplace struggles alone; they emerge as a new configuration of political forces including, *inter alia*, political parties, trade unions, business organizations, state officials, policy experts, social movements, and so on. Therefore politics as well as economics contributes to a moment of regulation or of crisis. Moreover, close attention to particular discursive contexts and institutionalized practices composing a hegemonic paradigm and a mode of regulation—indeed the very contours of the mobilization process in regulation and in crisis—demonstrate that power relations are the expression of specific historical institutional forms and patterns of conflict and compromise.

What does all this have to do with feminism?

There are, of course, many feminisms. In addition to the political divisions over practice and theory which cleaved the women's movements of all countries, the centre of gravity of the movements—the most important strands and their debates—differed widely. Whereas the Canadian women's movement was weighted towards bourgeois feminism, with smaller—albeit significant—socialist and radical feminist wings, the fulcrum of the French women's movement came from the strand which had exited from or remained uneasily affiliated with the Far Left (*gauchistes*) in the early 1970s, and which was self-identified as revolutionary feminist. Grouped around this centre were

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<sup>9</sup> Obviously, by this time I was speaking of only some of the Regulationists. The work of Alain Lipietz has been most influential for me, as we have had dialogue about these matters. For his version of some of these themes, see, *inter alia*, *Choisir l'audace*, Paris 1989.

syndicalist feminists and egalitarian feminists who, of necessity, were in dialogue with the others.<sup>20</sup>

In the high theoretical debates and low politics which characterized the main strand of French feminism, a central notion quickly appeared to organize the disputes—the idea of *la différence*. In some of its documents in the 1970s, 'French feminism', at least as practised by the trinity of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, defined its revolutionary politics in terms of a symbolic revolution, intended to depose, through disruption and subversion, Western patriarchal language and thought. Taking the Logos as the enemy, these theorists called for an overturning of the binary oppositions of Western thought, so as to subvert the Identity which such thought had sustained between the 'male' and the one. The call for inscription of the 'female'—that is, difference, otherness—in language and thought brought with it an essentialism, a resort to biologism and to ahistoricism, and an unlinking of meaning and practice, which generated a great deal of controversy. It also inserted into the heart of French feminist discussions ideas about the centrality of language, the complexity of identity, and disputes over revolution. It also, through its assault on Cartesian logic, re-opened some space for more dialectical, non-linear thinking about open structures.<sup>21</sup>

The French women's movement did not always speak the language or even reproduce the debates of the 'French feminists' of course.<sup>22</sup> But there was within the movement a flow of ideas which translated high theory into daily politics. Opposing views circulated in the feminist press that burgeoned after 1975, debating the ways to think about class, the ways to imagine the revolution, the possibilities of reform. Much of this controversy, moreover, involved people taking positions on the central concept of 'difference'—whether it should be celebrated or effaced, whether it was biologically or socially constructed, and whether, more generally, it could be incorporated into the revolutionary projects of not only French feminism but the broader Left. In other words, while the North American women's movement in the 1970s remained resolutely—and correctly—suspicious of essentialism and difference until the latter part of the decade,

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<sup>20</sup> For a description of this variety and its results, see Jane Jenson, 'Representations of Difference: The Varieties of French Feminism', *NLR* 180, March–April 1990.

<sup>21</sup> Luce Irigaray's work in particular stressed non-determinism and open structures, albeit combined with an essentialism about femininity and the ongoing structures of Western thought which sat less well with such openness.

<sup>22</sup> Sometimes it did, however. For a wonderful account of the controversy surrounding the 1975 *Semaine de la Pensée Marxiste*, sponsored by the Communist Party and devoted to 'Women and Sexuality', see Catherine Clément in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, *New French Feminisms*, New York 1981, pp. 130–6. At this meeting, where Irigaray also spoke (along with the representatives of the PCF leadership) hecklers accused Clément of 'being a man' because she spoke 'linearly'. In this article she struggles to untangle the political implications of the hecklers' refusal to allow women to use 'men's' language or even to speak in public unless they mouthed the approved slogans. She wonders at the authoritarianism of 'feminist' hecklers who refused to let her words be heard. Such controversy dominated the 1970s, when great debates about whether women could and should 'write' propelled 'French feminist' authors to international fame, and when the group *Psychanalyse et Politique* opposed all ordinary political interventions—including the campaign to reform the abortion law.

the French movement had grown up with such controversies; and anyone parachuted into it—as I was in 1977—had to think seriously about the impact of language, about identity, about social construction and essentialism, and so on.

My years living in France from 1977–79 correspond to what I now see as both the summit and the nadir of French feminism and post-1968 leftism. On the plus side was the fact that *gauchistes*, the Communist Party, and the union movement had all begun to take seriously both feminism, in all its variety, and the autonomous women's movement. Therefore, the time I spent as a participant-observer of a Communist cell in Paris was the time of the Eurocommunists' greatest effort to reconcile—although never without difficulty—their traditional leftism with the lessons coming from the women's movement.<sup>13</sup> Similar things were going on among Trotskyists; in the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT); and among the smaller *groupuscules*. The result was a great deal of debate, ferment, pain and political mistakes, as well as some successes. On the side of the women's movement, too, conflicts were rife, especially as *Psychanalyse et Politique* used the patent law in 1979 to appropriate the trademark of MLF (the symbol of the women's liberation movement which had thus far been accessible to any women claiming to be 'in the movement'). With this violent act, one part of the movement rejected the rest, which responded in kind with verbal—and sometimes physical—violence. 'The women's movement' was no longer the darling of the media, and male politicians could find reasons to ignore it too.

These painfully complicated moments left a legacy. As all feminists knew—whether they elaborated the insight in the jargon of 'French feminist' literary and psychoanalytic theory or the more accessible phrasing of anglo-saxon feminism—women's lives had to be 'made visible' by claiming their voices and labelling their oppression. So, a major legacy of my encounter with feminism was the absolute certainty that what was said was as important as what was done; indeed the doing could not be separated from the saying. In this way the concept of the 'universe of political discourse' emerged, to provide a way to describe how the labelling of actors—that is, the ascription of collective identities—was an expression of power. Moreover, as I struggled to make sense of difference, I had to come to terms with class analysis as well as essentialism. If my feminism made impossible any assumption that class was the primary contradiction, my personal experience with the varieties of ways of being a woman and a feminist—as lived so differently by French and North American women and their women's movements—made any resort to essentialism impossible. The only possible conclusion was that relations of difference must be a social construction, and I began to wonder how social relations of difference, reflecting inequities of power, came into existence.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This experience is described in detail in Jane Jenson and George Ross, *The View from Inside. A French Communist Cell in Crisis*, Berkeley 1984, which chronicles debates about how to relate to the women's movement and feminism.

<sup>14</sup> This step in my analysis, as well as an elaboration of the universe of political discourse, is developed in Jane Jenson, 'Gender and Reproduction: Or, Babies and the State', *Studies in Political Economy*, 20, 1986.

Then came the next step. If I considered history to be socially constructed, I had to have some way of thinking about the agency involved in making that history. Any kind of structuralist or post-structuralist analysis could not sit well with such a view of history. Moreover, being unable to 'think' agency, post-structuralism is not a theory or a politics that empowers. Therefore, it would not go well with my view of feminism. Much 'French feminism', of course, had become the mainstay of post-structuralist-style arguments which expressed a good deal of suspicion about 'the subject'. While post-structuralism is a thesis about power—and particularly the power to disseminate meanings (and the practices which follow from them)—this power is the power of the meanings (the discourses), and nowhere are there acting subjects. This way of conceptualizing power is profoundly undemocratic, giving as it does all power to the text (or, more correctly, its reader) and denying subjects any space for creativity in their own lives.

Therefore, the task for my feminism was to avoid the disempowering and anti-democratic formulations of post-structuralism while retaining the insight about the inequities of power that propel discourses. This meant thinking about acting subjects as well as subjects of structures. Once again this charge came directly from feminism. If contemporary feminism in all its manifestations and all its national settings has had one majoritarian position, it is that feminist politics is about empowering women.<sup>5</sup> Feminism is supposed to give women their voice, allow them to change their lives, and remake, through the effects of such feminist thinking, politics as a whole. Whether dependent upon notions of the social construction of difference which inspire a politics of fragments, or a somewhat more historical reading of the differences of 'women's voices' à la Carol Gilligan or Jean Baker Miller, the movement's whole purpose has been empowerment. It is this goal that has come up against the wall of post-structuralism's rejection of subjects, subjectivity and power anywhere but in disembodied discourse, and it marks a break between those who continue along the path of 'discourse analysis' and those who move towards theories of historical agency.

Thus, one of the crucial legacies of those feminist analyses which take seriously the notion that gender relations are social constructions and that social constructions result from both structures and agency—that is, that people make their own history but not under conditions of their own choosing—is a move towards analyses which examine the dialectic between the abstraction of structures and the specificity of historical circumstances.

These legacies of my own encounter with feminism form the core of the argument in 'Canada's Permeable Fordism'. It is a paper which takes meaning systems as well as practices seriously. Both the mode of

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<sup>5</sup> That this is not a unanimous position is clear from the claims of feminists operating within post-structuralism. To the extent that such formulations can empower no agents, these feminists do not privilege empowerment as the core of feminist politics. This divergence over empowerment does a lot to account for peculiar controversies like those between the 'experiential' and the 'post-structuralist' feminist historians.

regulation and the societal paradigm depend upon actors' strategies in creating their representational systems and thereby constructing their collective identities. Secondly, it critiques traditional political economy, even the Regulation approach and many efforts to 'politicize' it, for proceeding as if Fordism (and most other regimes of accumulation) depend primarily on the mobilization of a primary contradiction and single collective identity, around the practices of labour-based institutions. The article argues that other political organizations and other identities provided the institutionalization of Canada's Fordism. And lastly, in analysing the variety of social relations, the historical openness of outcomes which create regulation and crisis, it reclaims a place for actors making choices in constraining but not interpellating structures. All three of these epistemological and substantive arguments derive from the ways in which some feminists have insisted on analysing gender relations as meanings and practices that can be transformed from the oppressing to the empowering of women so as to create greater democracy in their lives and more democratic forms of knowing.

### Epilogue

Writing one's biography, even one's intellectual biography, is a scary task, not simply because of the fear of revealing oneself. More daunting is the evidence of the structuring effects of narrative. Since I set out to answer a question about feminism's impact on my thinking about Canada, I pulled one single thread of the narrative. Then the propulsion of intellectual production compelled me in the direction of coherence and linearity in the narrative. So, . . . the story which emerges is one of logical—even inevitable—cumulating events, encounters, and interpretations of them. Such is the consequence of posing one question—about feminism—and using the narrative form. However, if I were to be truly post-modern (or even an epistemologically sophisticated realist, which I aim to be) I would have to admit that I could have told the same story in three other ways, and I might have offered all four stories for the reader's selection.<sup>16</sup> All I can do, to be honest, is sketch out the alternative narrative threads from which I might have composed a tapestry to explain how I got to permeable Fordism.

The first of these alternatives is the most important and *must* be read along with the version presented here. I might have arrived—and indeed often did arrive—at my analytical positions because of socialist politics and class analysis rather than feminism. Certainly the rejection of post-structuralism and the insistence on agency-driven and more open visions of history follows directly and precipitately from my encounter with French Eurocommunism and the neo-Marxist theory (the Poulantzas of *State, Power, Socialism*, for example) that went along with it. Sensitivity to power and strategies for empowerment are

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<sup>16</sup> Another French theorist made this point about narrative differently but more trenchantly. As the Pent Prince was fond of pointing out, some people's hats are often other people's boa constrictors.

as much rooted in that tradition as they are in feminism. In the same way, Gramsci's vision of civil society and the politics needed to transform it—a vision also carried by much of 1970s and 1980s socialism—forced us to rethink the issue of class formation and the mobilization of non-class identities, just as his words about 'morbid symptoms' suggest that the present may be less a sign of an unfolding future than a testimony to the collapse of past social relations.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the first alternative version is really a substitute narrative that would have resulted if I had tugged on the thread of my rejection of post-Marxism, especially the post-Marxism of those engaged in an uncritical celebration of social-movement and identity politics. Nevertheless, while being an alternative, it is also an essential part of the whole story. My feminism was not *any* feminism but socialist feminism in which both socialist theory and practice and feminist theory and practice collaborated. No more than one can identify the pre-eminence of the warp over the woof in making a fabric, it is impossible to say which strand holds the fabric of the analysis together—or creates the 'holes' that require creativity to fill.

The second alternative addresses the matter of coherence. In the interest of telling the truth, it is important briefly to point out that the move towards 'permeable Fordism' was not lived as I describe it. The smoothness of the tale, the logical building on progressive insights, was never how it happened. It was, instead, largely haphazard, replete with chance encounters with books and people. It was also full of blind spots and silliness, and moments in which I felt—and no doubt seemed to the people around me—totally unaware of what was happening in the several societies I inhabited. Therefore, I offer this alternative as a corrective to the cumulative version about increasing 'wisdom'.

But there is also a fourth version of this tale, one which is also as correct as the others and must in all honesty be acknowledged here too. This is the story of the people in it. All this feminism and socialism and toing-and-froing about discourse, democracy, and the structure/agency question were lived with and through people, not books or theorists. There were friends, *companions*, students, colleagues and a husband—all of whom were comrades in one way or another—with whom all of this was experienced and without whom it would never have been understood. There is, after all, an exceptional aspect to this story, and it is the exceptional political wisdom, generosity and goodwill of the people from whom I learn so much—and that *is* the way that feminism got into permeable Fordism.

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<sup>17</sup> For those who have not committed Gramsci to heart: '[T]he modern crisis . . . means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.' (Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London 1971, pp. 275–6.)

## The Crisis of the Arab World: The False Answers of Saddam Hussein

The crisis following upon Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is unique in the contemporary world, above all because of the multiple levels upon which it is being played out. In international terms, it is comparable to the major crises of the post-1945 period—Berlin 1948, Korea 1950, Suez 1956, Cuba 1962, the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973. Yet it is distinct from, and more complex than, any of these. It is distinct because this crisis does not assume an East-West form, one of Soviet-American antagonism, and has in fact involved a significant degree of Soviet-American cooperation, if not complete agreement. It is more complex because in addition to its world dimension it has several other ones: it has provoked a crisis within the Arab world, between the bloc led by Iraq and that led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt; it involves to a degree never seen in modern times all three of the non-Arab states in the Middle East—Iran, Turkey, Israel; it is a crisis within the US alliance, over the degree of military and financial support being given to the USA in the Gulf; it is also a crisis of the international economic system, given the importance of oil and the inflationary pressures which higher oil prices and increased military expenditures in the developed capitalist states have brought; finally, it is a crisis of the global political system, as reflected in the question of whether the United Nations can, or cannot, act to prevent evident breaches of its Charter.

For the Arab world, in particular, this crisis marks a decisive moment, however the confrontation between Iraq and the West resolves itself. The Arab states have divided strongly in the past, as after the 1962 revolution in Yemen, and Sadat's visit to Israel in 1977. But this division gives the appearance of being deeper than any previous one: the invitation to Western armies by Saudi Arabia, and the alliance of several Arab states against Iraq, promises to strengthen the disunity of the Arab world. At the same time, the Iraqi action against Kuwait poses more clearly than at any time for nearly thirty years the question of Arab unity and of the unity of Arab politics in general. Iraq has captured Kuwait in the name of Arab unity, and no Arab state can be neutral or indifferent to this crisis.

This re-posing of the issue of the unity of the Arab world is evident in

two respects. First, Saddam Hussein has revived the dynamic of secular Arab nationalism, with at its core the goals of Arab political unity and the redistribution of Arab oil wealth. For twenty years or more it has been widely assumed that this political programme, which Nasser promoted in the 1950s and early 1960s, has failed: its defeat was sealed in the defeat of 1967. Since the Iranian revolution it appeared that the initiative throughout the Middle East, including the Arab world, was in the hands of Islamist forces: they were the ones challenging imperialism, attacking established regimes, calling for the distribution of wealth, organizing the oppressed. Now the initiative has been retaken by the secular nationalists. Of course, Saddam uses Islamic language and poses as the champion of Islam. But everyone knows this is appearance only, a political camouflage. Saddam has been militantly opposed to Islamist politics within Iraq and outside. What he has effectively done by his action on 2 August is to steal their clothes and regain the leadership of radical politics in the region. This is one reason why Iran is so worried—it has lost the radical leadership.

The issue of unity is posed in a second respect, namely that of frontiers. One of the distinctive features of the Middle East as a whole—Arab and non-Arab—is the degree to which frontiers are regarded as irrelevant. Arab nationalists say the frontiers of the region are temporary and artificial creations. This is of course true, in that most of the boundaries were created by administrative decision, and usually under colonial rule, in the early part of this century. But in itself this is not specific to the Middle East: most of the frontiers in Europe and Africa are equally arbitrary and equally recent. What is at stake is not the issue of boundary definition—where geographically the frontier lies—but rather the question of whether the delimitation of states should be respected at all. What is distinctive about the Middle East, then, is the refusal of states to accept this delimitation. Interference in the internal affairs of other states is more pervasive in the region than anywhere else. Indeed, it follows from the logic of Arab nationalism that frontiers merely divide a political community that should be united.

This argument has been heard many times before: in the union of Syria and Egypt in 1958; in the various Libyan attempts at union; in the Syrian claim that it has a right to intervene in Lebanon; in the—ultimately successful—drive for Yemeni unity. What Saddam has done is to restate this case in a singularly stark way. Yet his ability to do so probably results from another more immediate trend, namely the questioning of frontiers in the aftermath of cold war. When the Communist regimes fell in Eastern Europe last year, lessons were quickly drawn: it was widely believed that dictatorships in the Middle East would also be vulnerable—and in particular Iraq. Many thought Saddam would share the fate of Ceausescu. But the fall of Communism had another consequence, one that will take much longer to work itself through: namely, the revision on an international scale of frontiers for the first time since the end of World War II. Everyone knew that the division of the world into the existing system of 170 states was arbitrary, but since 1945 it has more or less been accepted. Until this year, there had been only one case of successful secession—Bangladesh in 1971—and only one of fusion—Vietnam in 1975.



## A Global Trend

The collapse of Communism has altered this: as a result of the retreat of Soviet power, at least three states seem fated to disappear—East Germany and South Yemen have already done so, and it is probable that the third, North Korea, will in time be absorbed by a much stronger and more populous South Korea. At the same time, the possibility of secession, and of the emergence of new states, is also posed: in the USSR, where several of the fifteen republics are moving towards independence, and in some countries of Eastern Europe, most obviously Yugoslavia. In this perspective, the annexation of Kuwait to Iraq is not only an Arab matter but part of a broader global trend: it represents the coming together of a long-standing Arab drive for the fusion of states with the contemporary questioning of state frontiers derived from the end of cold war.

If the Iraqi action against Kuwait therefore represents a revival of political goals present in the earlier period of Arab nationalism, it raises at the same time a number of difficulties for the Arab world as a whole, ones that will persist however the crisis is resolved. If Iraq survives the crisis, it will continue to promote these policies in the name of Arab nationalism. If Iraq suffers military defeat, there will be many in the Arab world who will continue to support the goals which Saddam has proclaimed. It is for this reason that the Iraqi action has aroused considerable support within Arab countries, many of whom, while disliking Iraq's internal and international policies, feel that Iraq embodies some of the goals of the revolutionary and radical nationalist movement so long kept on the defensive in the Arab world.

Four issues in particular appear to be central to the Iraqi appeal in the Arab world: unification, redistribution of oil wealth, liberation of Palestine, resistance to imperialism. Amongst much of the population of the Arab world and amongst some of the intelligentsia, Saddam Hussein has found support because of his stand on these issues. The fusion of Kuwait with Iraq marks a step in the direction of Arab unity, with the removal of a boundary many regard as artificial and a colonial creation. The call for equal distribution of the oil revenues is an apparent attempt to resolve the fact that most Arab oil is found in countries with small populations, where conservative monarchies hold sway, and to reallocate this to the much larger oil-free countries. Saddam's stand on Palestine represents a break with the conciliation of much of the Arab world over recent years, a policy that seems to have done nothing to help weaken the Israeli position. As for external influence, the response of the West to the occupation of Kuwait seems to confirm that this remains a danger to all Arabs.

No one can doubt that the issues which Saddam is claiming to confront are real issues. The question is, rather, whether his solutions are the right ones, and whether they are likely to help to resolve these issues. Here there is room for considerable doubt, especially if the nature of Saddam's regime is taken into account. The Arab nationalist programme of unity was linked, as in the time of Nasser, to the question of popular control and of democracy. In the case of Ba'athist Iraq,

these considerations are absent. Ba' thist Iraq is a ferocious dictatorship, marked by terror and coercion unparalleled within the Arab world. Ba' thist ideology is overtly racist—towards Persians, Jews, Kurds. It is a regime that bears more resemblance to European fascism, in ideology and in its mechanisms of staying in power, than to a democratic or popular nationalist model. The internal character of Ba' thist Iraq affects any judgement of the kind of unity that regime achieves. There is all the world of difference between unity that comes about as a response to popular will and one that is imposed by military force: the recent instances of union in Yemen and in Germany are, for all their difficulties, democratic ones. That of Kuwait with Iraq is coercive, as is evident in the fact that no Kuwaiti support for it could be mobilized, not even from Kuwait Ba' thists.

The redistribution of oil revenues within the Arab world is a priority, but not one that Iraq's action against Kuwait can solve. First, Iraq itself is not a poor country but has some of the largest oil reserves in the region. There is little justification for Iraq seizing the oil resources of Kuwait. Moreover, if economic benefit is the criterion, then the action itself has caused immense economic loss. Kuwait has, for the time being at least, been destroyed as a functioning economic entity, and hundreds of thousands of foreign workers and professional migrants have been driven out. Iraq itself has had to divert enormous resources to maintain its military machine. The boycott aside, it has to be imagined what is involved in keeping over one million men under arms in a country of seventeen million. If there is war, for which Iraq will be to a considerable extent responsible, then the economic costs will be even greater.

The question of Palestine explains much of Saddam's appeal but also contains the most cruel deceptions. Support for Palestine rests upon the argument that the Palestinian people are oppressed by Israel and denied the right to their own states. But Iraq has no right to claim to support the rights of any oppressed people, since it has treated the Kurdish minority within its own borders in a way similar to the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians. As violators of the rights of oppressed peoples, Iraq and Israel are comparable. Moreover, even in a strictly Arab context, Iraq's policy on Palestine has long been a two-faced one—promotion of division amongst Palestinian forces and inaction in practice, covered by demagogic militancy in words. Iraq, in common with Syria and Libya, has used its radical image to divide and weaken the Palestinians. Many of those Palestinians assassinated after calling for Arab-Israeli dialogue have been killed by Iraqi agents. Indeed one can conclude from past behaviour that neither Iraq nor Syria would want to see an independent Palestinian state, unless they controlled it.

Iraq has also pushed the Palestinians into a maximalist isolation, one that denies the possibility of a two-state solution—the creation of a Palestinian state side by side with an Israeli one—and has undermined, by its recent actions, the creation of any significant links between Palestinian and opposition forces within Israel. The militaristic and chauvinist statements issued by Baghdad have only reinforced the most extreme Zionist sentiment within Israel and within

the West. The end result is only too clear: if there is war in the region, and if Israel becomes involved, then there will be a new and final tragedy for the Palestinians. As in 1948 and 1967, Zionist militants may well use the occasion of an inter-state war to drive out the Palestinians, to effect what in Israel is evasively referred to as 'transfer'. If this occurs, there may be forced deportations from Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. A million people may be thrown into Lebanon and Jordan. Iraq, far from assisting the Palestinians, is in fact acting as their greatest enemy, and is objectively an accomplice of the most expansionist forces in Israel.

### On Imperialism

Iraq's claim to be 'confronting' imperialism has no more validity. Some of the supposed links between Iraq and the West are dubious: there is no evidence, despite Iranian claims, that Washington encouraged Iraq to invade Iran in 1980; nor is it sensible to argue that Iraq and the USA have colluded to divide up the Arab world between them through manipulation of this crisis. However, for all its anti-imperialist rhetoric, the Ba' thist regime in Baghdad has benefited on many occasions from the help of the USA. This was most obviously the case, in 1987 and 1988, in the latter stages of the war with Iran, when the US navy entered the Gulf and acted as an ally of Iraq. The USA also provided Iraq with military intelligence about Iran, derived from satellite photographs. Iraq now claims that prior to its occupation of Kuwait the USA was planning to attack it, and that US diplomats encouraged Iraq to invade and so laid a trap for it. These are specious arguments. Most importantly, however, if the goal is to expel Western influence from the region, the action taken by Iraq has had the opposite result. There are now over 200,000 Western troops in the Gulf and, however the crisis ends, there is going to be a greatly enlarged permanent Western presence in the region for many years to come, indeed as long as the Gulf remains a major source of oil. Twenty years after the British withdrawal, Iraq has succeeded in bringing the imperialist forces back in.

The issue on which the Kuwait crisis confronts both the Arab world and the West is that of consistency. The West's policy has been rightly condemned for its inconsistency: for failing to take action, through the United Nations, against Israel while doing so against Iraq. Equally other cases of illegal intervention—Syria in Lebanon, Turkey in Cyprus, Morocco in the Sahara—have been passed over in silence. The United Nations has to adopt the same attitude to its allies as it has done to Iraq. Comparable condemnation of, and effective sanctions against, Israel are needed. It would, however, be mistaken to use criticism of Western hypocrisy to collude in what is a clear case of aggression by a fascist state.

The question of consistency also applies to Iraq. Iraq claims, among its other justifications for invading Kuwait, to be overcoming the 'colonialist' legacy of division. Kuwait, it is said, was once part of Iraq and is now reunited with it. This is a dangerous argument. Most of Kuwait was never part of the vilayat of Basra. Moreover, if Kuwait

is an artificial political entity, created by colonialism, so too is Iraq. By calling for the revision of frontiers, Iraq is opening up the possibility that its frontiers too will be subject to revision.

The modern state of Iraq, for all its claims to represent the ancient kingdom of Mesopotamia and the Abbasid state, is as much the creation of British imperialism as is Kuwait. This means that, whatever differences divide Arab states, they cannot be resolved by one state occupying the other and denying its legitimacy. The only long-term solution to the issue of legitimacy is for the governments of these states to acquire a democratic form, something neither Saddam nor the monarchs of the peninsula want to entertain. The alternative is that the same interventionist logic will be applied to Iraq: Iran, Turkey, Syria, Saudi Arabia could all make claims on part of Iraq. This alone should suggest that Saddam Hussein's answer to the Kuwait crisis is a false one. Let us hope that it will not also lead to tragedy through a war in which the Arab peoples, and especially the people of Iraq, will be the greatest losers.

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## Trade Unionism in the USA

These are difficult days for the labour movement in the United States, and the situation is even worse for the radical labour movement. Trade-union membership in the non-farm labour force has declined from over 30 per cent in the early 1950s to about 17 per cent today. The real standard of living for workers has been falling since the mid 1970s. Concessionary contracts and schemes of labour-management cooperation, unthinkable even a few years ago, have become commonplace. As for the radical tradition: when in 1906 a famous essay by Werner Sombart asked 'Why is There No Socialism in the United States?', the US labour movement may have been closer to socialism than at any time thereafter. In 1905 the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded, declaring that the working and employing classes had nothing in common. In 1912 Eugene Debs, running as Socialist Party candidate for President of the United States, received nearly 900,000 votes (6 per cent of the electorate). Very little has been heard since from the labour movement in the United States about the socialist transformation of the relations of production.

Kim Moody's *An Injury to All* and David Montgomery's *Fall of the House of Labor* together help us to assess how all this came about and to explore what can be done about it.\* In part I of this article, I will examine Kim Moody's distinction between 'business unionism' and 'social unionism', and how it leads him to oversimplify the history of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). In part II, I will suggest that by characterizing the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) at the close of World War II as illustrative of 'social unionism', Moody appears to propose a social-democratic future for American workers. In part III, I will argue that a better way forward is exemplified by certain of Moody's own case-studies and by David Montgomery's description of the work of radical labour activists in the early years of the twentieth century.

### I 'Business Unionism' and 'Social Unionism'

*An Injury to All* sets out in its opening pages certain conceptual distinctions that characterize the argument of the remainder of the book.

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\* Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism*, Verso, London and New York 1988, £34.95/\$59.95 hbk, £11.95/\$18.95 pbk; David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor. The Workplace, the State and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987, £40.00/\$34.50 hbk, £15.00/\$14.95 pbk.

Moody believes that the labour movement must choose between two kinds of unionism: 'social unionism' and 'business unionism.' Social unionism is said to be based on the value of 'community', defined as 'the sense that liberty is nurtured in an informal environment where the voluntary and collective enterprise of people with common interests contributes to the solution of problems.' Business unionism, on the other hand, is thought to derive from 'individualism', understood as a belief in hard work, ingenuity and 'the capacity of people to rise by their own wills.'

In Moody's view, the practice of the labour movement is communal, but the movement's ideology has time and again been skewed toward individualism. The notion that honest toil assures economic success is an 'utter falsehood.' For this reason, 'workers have always turned toward collective forms of action to increase the rewards of labour.' However, individualism has 'dominated [the] official ideology' of trade-union leaders who, from the founding in 1886 of the American Federation of Labor, have imposed this false consciousness from above on the spontaneous collectivism of the rank and file.

The labour history told in *An Injury to All*, accordingly, is a tale in which the 'social unionism' toward which the objective condition of workers naturally tends does eternal battle with the 'business unionism' espoused by leaders infected by the individualistic ethos of American capitalism. However, the result is an oversimplified history, which obstructs, rather than opens, the way to a more accurate assessment of labour's present dilemmas. Because the whole tangled skein of events is reduced to a Hegelian drama in which two values (community and individualism) are thought to have been expressed in two kinds of unionism ('social' and 'business' unionism), organizations tend to be viewed as exemplars of one or the other of the two underlying paradigms; and our task for the future is understood simply as the resurrection of the good, or 'social', kind of labour movement. Thus the 'individualism' said to characterize the AFL reflected the 'consciousness of the skilled craft workers who composed the unions of the early AFL'. Further: '[B]eyond the advancement of the individual members that composed the union, labor, in this view, had no broader responsibilities to the working class as a whole. They called themselves "pure and simple unionists" and, in effect, invented business unionism—a unionism that sees members primarily as consumers and limits itself to negotiating the price of labor. This individualist approach to raising the price of labor expressed itself through attempts to limit the labor market to the skilled members of the various craft unions—resulting in exclusion rather than comprehensive organization in the new industries.' This is the picture of the AFL common to labour histories written thirty to fifty years ago in the flush of early CIO victories. The picture is not untrue, but it is only a partial truth.

Surprisingly, Moody's volume—published in 1988—shows no awareness of David Montgomery's *Workers' Control in America*, a collection of essays published in 1979 that revolutionized historians' understanding of skilled craftsmen and their struggles in the era of the founding of the AFL. Where Moody, reiterating the older view, finds in

the AFL only individualism and business unionism, Montgomery sees a constellation of practices among skilled workers that he terms—choosing just the opposite characterization—'mutualism.' According to Montgomery, '[t]he three levels of development which appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century were those characterized by (1) the functional autonomy of the craftsman; (2) the union work rule; and (3) mutual support of diverse trades in rule enforcement and sympathetic strikes.' By 'work rules' Montgomery means 'the moral code, in which the craftsmen's autonomy was protectively enmeshed.' This had three aspects. First, on most jobs there was an output quota fixed by the workers themselves. Second, the craftsmen's ethical code demanded a 'manly' bearing toward the boss. Third, and most at variance with Moody's stereotyped view of craft individualism, skilled craftsmen in the late nineteenth century enforced their work rules by courageous solidarity actions in which the individual set aside short-run self-interest for the sake of preserving the welfare of the group. 'The autonomy of craftsmen, which was codified in union rules,' declares Montgomery, 'was clearly not individualistic. Craftsmen were unmistakably and consciously group-made men, who sought to pull themselves upward by their collective boot straps.'

Mutual support of skilled craftsmen of diverse trades in rule enforcement and sympathetic strikes is statistically demonstrable, according to Montgomery. Strikes aimed merely at increasing wages or preventing wage reductions *decreased* after the formation of the AFL in 1886. 'Strikes to enforce union rules, enforce recognition of the union, and protect its members grew from 10 per cent of the total or less before 1885 to the level of 19 to 20 per cent between 1891 and 1893.' The percentage of strikes that were wage strikes was over 70 per cent from 1881 to 1885, but under 60 per cent from 1899 through 1905. It is simply not true, moreover, that the AFL discouraged sympathetic strikes in support of workers in other trades. According to Montgomery,

[T]he practice of sympathetic strikes was ardently defended by the AFL in the 1890s. Building trades contracts explicitly provided for sympathetic stoppages. Furthermore, at the federation's 1895 convention a resolution carried, directing the executive council to 'convey to the unions, in such way as it thinks proper, not to tie themselves up with contracts so that they cannot help each other when able.' The council itself denied in a report to the same convention that it opposed sympathetic strikes. 'On the contrary,' it declared, 'we were banded together to help one another. The words "union", "federation", implied it. An organization which held aloof when assistance could be given to a sister organization, was deserving of censure', even though each union had the right to decide its own course of action.

In short, Montgomery insisted, as craftsmen unionized they 'manifested a *growing* consciousness of the dependence of their efforts on those of workers in other crafts' [emphasis in original]. Their autonomy as craftsmen 'both nurtured and was nurtured by a mutualistic ethic, which repudiated important elements of acquisitive individualism.' These same craftsmen and their unions were also generally hostile to blacks, to women, to the unskilled, to the organization of industrial unions, and to socialism. Thus they exemplified both



solidarity and individualism, both 'business unionism' and 'social unionism'.

Just as *An Injury to All* underestimates the theme of solidarity in the struggles of skilled craftsmen at the turn of the century, so it exaggerates that theme in the history of the CIO. According to Moody, '[t]he vast social movement that created the CIO and organized basic industry in the US has been the greatest achievement of the American working class to date . . . The CIO espoused a modern version of social unionism, in which organized labor was envisioned as a force that would lead to the raising of the living standards of an entire nation.' This portrait of the CIO as illustrative of 'social unionism' is just as misleading as the unflattering portrayal of the AFL as merely the exemplar of 'business unionism.' By failing to go to the roots of the sickness of CIO unionism, this analysis offers only conventional and limited insight into the question of what the labour movement should do next.

## II A Social-Democratic Future?

The Committee for Industrial Organization, or, as it later called itself, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, was created in 1935 by the presidents of certain AFL unions who saw a need for industrial organization. From another point of view, these union bureaucrats—notably John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers and Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers—seized an opportunity that resulted from a phenomenal upsurge of self-organization by rank-and-file workers in the years 1933–1935. These rank-and-file struggles prior to the founding of the CIO and the passage of the National Labor Relations Act, or Wagner Act, in 1935, had two main features. First, they relied on the strike weapon, most successfully in the 1934 local general strikes in Minneapolis, Toledo and San Francisco, and also in the unsuccessful national textile strike in the same year. Second, they turned to independent labour politics. Between the years 1932 and 1936 local labour parties fielded candidates in Cambridge, New Bedford, and Springfield, Massachusetts; Berlin and Lincoln, New Hampshire; Danbury and Hartford, Connecticut; Buffalo and New York City; Allentown and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Akron, Canton, and Toledo, Ohio; Detroit, Hamtramck, and Port Huron, Michigan; Chicago and Hillsboro, Illinois; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Everett and Goldbar, Washington; and San Francisco, California. In at least ten other communities central labour unions endorsed the idea of a labour party, as did the State Federations of Labor of Rhode Island, Connecticut, Vermont, New Jersey, and Wisconsin. And at the 1935 AFL convention, a resolution endorsing a labour party lost by only 108 votes to 104.

Even after the passage of the Wagner Act and the formation of the CIO, the first victories for industrial unionism came from below, through extra-legal rank-and-file sit-down strikes at the Akron rubber plants and the General Motors plant in Flint, Michigan. Historians have debated whether the workers who spontaneously occupied their factories wanted anything more than union recognition and collective bargaining. At a minimum, it seems clear, they wanted increased

control over their immediate work conditions. In rubber and automobile plants on the San Francisco waterfront, and in 'Little Steel' mills like the Inland Steel mill near Chicago, workers used their new unions to assert control over their work through wildcat strikes, slowdowns and other kinds of direct action. 'Without a contract', recalled steelworker John Sargent, 'we secured for ourselves agreements on working conditions and wages . . . better by far than what we do have today [1970].'

*An Injury to All* begins its history of the CIO at the end of World War II. And by beginning in 1945, Moody's history not only offers a more tepid CIO 'social unionism' than he might have found in the rank-and-file upheavals of the 1930s, but also neglects the strains of business unionism that were part of the CIO from its inception. To begin with, *CIO unions came into being in the context of the National Labor Relations Act as exclusive bargaining representatives certified by the state*. Before the 1930s, labour organizations in the United States—whatever their other differences—had jealously guarded the concept of union independence and autonomy. In contrast, the desired objective of CIO unions was to become legal monopolies, complete with enforced membership (union shop) and an independent source of income, thereby ending the financial accountability of unions to their members (dues check-off). The danger of such state sponsorship for an independent, radical labour movement was clearly perceived at the time. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the Communist Party (prior to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935), the American Civil Liberties Union, and independent radicals like A.J. Muste, for this reason opposed—or expressed grave reservations about—the passage of the National Labor Relations Act.

In 1934, when the first version of the Act was proposed, Mary Van Kleeck of the ACLU wrote to the Act's principal sponsor, Senator Robert Wagner, advising him that the ACLU would oppose his bill because of the 'inevitable trends of its administration'. Van Kleeck explained that 'the danger is that the effort to regulate industrial relations by requiring of employers certain 'fair practices,' while appearing to impose those obligations upon them, necessarily brings the whole subject within the scope of governmental regulation. This involves a certain assumption as to a status quo. To prevent or discourage strikes which have for their purpose gradual increase in the workers' power in a period when fundamental economic change in the ownership of industry can clearly be envisaged, may only serve to check the rising power of the exponents of human rights, and indeed to protect private-property rights in exchange for obligations which are likely to be merely the least common denominator of industrial practice.'

Van Kleeck concluded by acknowledging that Senator Wagner's bill explicitly protected the right of workers to strike, but 'insisted that pressures would inevitably be exerted on the National Labor Relations Board to discourage strikes in favor of less disruptive methods of resolving conflicts.' At about the same time, ACLU president Roger Baldwin, writing to Senator David Walsh, agreed that the machinery proposed by the pending legislation would 'impair labor's rights in the long run, however much its authors may intend precisely the contrary.'

In 1935, this time in response to the final version of the Wagner Act, Baldwin wrote to Wagner that the ACLU would oppose creation of a National Labor Relations Board 'on the ground that no such federal agency intervening in the conflicts between employers and employees can be expected fairly to determine the issues of labor's rights. We say this from a long experience with the various boards set up in Washington, all of which have tended to take from labor its basic right to strike by substituting mediation, conciliation, or, in some cases, arbitration.' Baldwin urged Wagner to consider 'the view that the pressures on any governmental agency from employers are so constant and determined that it is far better to have no governmental intervention than to suffer the delusion that it will aid labor in its struggle for the rights to organize, bargain collectively and strike.'

Even before the Wagner Act had been passed and the CIO had been founded, these critics accurately forecasted the domestication and decline of a labour movement sponsored by the government. Further, *CIO unions were from the outset committed to contractualism, that is, to the regulation of relations between employer and employee by means of a legally binding collective bargaining agreement that (1) forbids strikes for the duration of the contract; and (2) cedes management decisions to the employer.* The very first contracts between General Motors and the UAW, and between United States Steel and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, in the spring of 1937, contained clauses prohibiting strikes for the duration of the contract. There was never a time when the leaders of CIO unions opposed such terms. Indeed, they presented themselves to management as guarantors of labour peace. Similarly, the 'management prerogatives clause', now typical in CIO contracts, was part of the very first collective bargaining agreement with US Steel in 1937. Then the clause stated:

The management of the works and the direction of the working forces, including the right to hire, suspend or discharge for proper cause, or transfer, and the right to relieve employees from duty because of lack of work or for other legitimate reasons, is vested exclusively in the Corporation.

Essentially the same words appear in the present US Steel contract:

The Company retains the exclusive rights to manage the business and plants and to direct the working forces . . . The rights to manage the business and plants and to direct the working forces include the right to hire, suspend or discharge for proper cause, or transfer, and the right to relieve employees from duty because of lack of work or for other legitimate reasons.

There was an intimate connection between government sponsorship of CIO organization, and the fact that CIO unions from the beginning negotiated contracts containing no-strike and management-prerogatives clauses. The preamble to the Wagner Act identified its principal objective as labour peace. CIO leaders acted the part they knew was expected of them if they were to receive ongoing support from the government. Radical labour journalist Len DeCaux wrote in April 1935 that when Lewis and other union officials testified before the Senate committee considering the Wagner Act, the labour leaders said in effect: 'Allow the workers to organize, establish strong govern-

mental machinery for dealing with labour questions, and industrial peace will result.' Thus when Moody laments the passing of the 'pattern bargaining' by means of which CIO unions established nationwide wage rates in the late 1940s and 1950s, he fails to perceive the larger bargain of which such patterns were a part. Major corporations were prepared to provide high, uniform wage rates only on condition that labour peace was guaranteed, so that their labour costs would be predictable. No-strike and management-prerogative clauses were therefore the quid in exchange for the quo of national wage rates.

Finally, *the leaders of CIO unions from the very beginning opposed all steps toward independent political action.* Hillman persuaded the Amalgamated to renounce its traditional commitment to a labour party and to endorse Roosevelt in 1936. At the UAW convention that same year, delegates first voted unanimously for a resolution calling for the formation of a national labour party, and defeated a resolution to back FDR. But when Lewis made a personal plea to the convention, and Adolf Germer, one of his lieutenants, issued a private warning to UAW president Homer Martin, the delegates reversed their decision. In April 1936, Lewis, Hillman and their associates, bankrolled by half a million dollars from the UMW alone and single-mindedly devoted to re-electing Roosevelt, founded the organization Labor's Nonpartisan League. It was the kiss of death for independent labour politics for years to come.

This was not the necessary consequence of voting for Franklin Roosevelt in national elections. Berlin, New Hampshire overwhelmingly supported FDR at the same time that it voted into power a local labour party. CIO activists could have supported Roosevelt's candidacies while putting their main energies into building local political movements independent of the Democratic Party. As late as 1946, the sociologist C. Wright Mills found that a third of local CIO officials favoured the immediate formation of a labour party. But national CIO leaders—fewer than 10 per cent of whom shared this sentiment—said No.

These elements of business unionism, integral to the CIO from its moment of origin, call into question Moody's argument that the bland and bureaucratic views of CIO leaders like Murray and Walter Reuther, (president of the UAW at the end of World War II) exemplified a desirable 'social unionism'. Here is what Moody writes:

The CIO that emerged from World War Two was the product of more than a decade of social upheaval... [T]he leaders who were shaped in those turbulent years despised the routine business unionism of their AFL rivals, whom they often fought in the streets. Many of these leaders were leftists who influenced the way the active rank and file viewed unionism, even if they failed to recruit many workers to socialism or Communism. Classes and class conflict were accepted facts that were reflected deeply in the culture of the period. The wartime debates and internal union factional struggles were waged on this intellectual terrain—inhabitable soil for the philosophy of business unionism.

In this environment, where socialist ideas flourished among an active minority but could not serve as a consensus alternative to the business-unionist outlook, the concept of social unionism arose. Former socialists

like Walter Reuther were among its more articulate proponents, but Catholics like Philip Murray, formerly a business unionist in the Lewis mold, and the anti-Communist members of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists shared the idea. Although vaguely social democratic in outlook, social unionism was not really a consistent political philosophy. Rather, it was a statement about the role of unions in society that differed strikingly from that of business unionism.

Unlike the AFL business unionists, the leaders of the CIO saw labor as a force for broad political and social change. The changes they envisioned were not revolutionary or even anti-capitalist, but the idea that unions had a social responsibility beyond improving their members' living standards was itself a break with AFL business unionism.

To my mind this passage reveals the weakness of the concept of 'social unionism', around which the whole of *An Injury to All* is structured. During World War II and after, Philip Murray espoused a quasi-fascist corporatism in which management, labour and government would run industries like steel in a partnership built from the top down. Yet Murray, according to Moody, was 'formerly a business unionist in the Lewis mold' who had emerged on the higher terrain of social unionism. Meanwhile, also during World War II, Lewis, the mere 'business unionist', was taking on the government in a series of strikes that defied the no-strike policy sponsored by, among others, Murray. DeCaux, who knew both men well, described them as follows:

No other leaders at hand could have led the CIO uprising of 1936-37 as did Lewis; they couldn't have 'set you afire' . . . Hillman had a certain subdued fire; Murray a few well-controlled embers. They and their social-reformist colleagues would have temporized with the AFL to start with. They'd have lacked Lewis's axe-like will to cut through all restraints.

The social-reformist tended to be even duller and less scrappy than the more earthy pure-and-simple unionist. He had rationalized his accommodations into a philosophy of gradualism and piecemeal reform. A compromiser, an adjuster, he typically counselled moderation. A disorderly challenge to the existing order upset his concept of progress. In turbulent times he became agitated and shaky, if not chicken.

Philip Murray was a high type of conventional labor leader—intelligent, experienced, with some vision. After he became CIO president, I tried dutifully to give his speeches the kind of play I'd given to Lewis's. But Murray's speeches . . . lacked the fire of the old maestro. A Lewis CIO speech . . . always blew battle. It could suggest goals 'over the hills and far away.' . . . Murray depicted the workers' advance to 'carpets on the floor, pictures on the wall, and music in the home'—but not much further. He kept his goals carefully within the confines of the existing social system.

My point is not to glorify Lewis rather than Murray. Lewis was a lifelong union autocrat, whose support of the Republican Willkie in 1940 was as destructive for the labour movement as his uncritical support of the Democrat Roosevelt in 1936. Rather, the point is that if Philip Murray was an exponent of the 'social unionism' that Moody espouses, we are being offered very thin soup indeed.

### III Lessons of the Past

At the end of *An Injury to All*, Moody offers some thoughts about

the future of the labour movement in the United States. He does so in an admirably non-sectarian spirit, carefully describing a variety of rank-and-file efforts to break out of the current impasse. But he also does so in a way that blurs the deep conflict between two alternative strategies: the one building up local bodies of workers drawn from different trades into instruments capable of supporting one another's strikes and running labour candidates for local public office; the other concentrating on electing new leaders to existing national unions. *A Injury to All* is dedicated to the packing-house workers of Hormel, Minnesota, and the cannery workers of Watsonville, California, on account of their inspiring locally organized strikes. After describing these struggles, Moody refers approvingly to 'cross- or multi-union formations such as stewards' councils, rank-and-file-based coordinated bargaining, [and] the use of corporate campaigns that mobilize workers across industrial lines to attack centres of capital.' He also describes the strategy of 'running the plant backward', supported by New Directions leader Jerry Tucker in UAW Region 5, which permits a contract to expire so that workers can then engage in concerted activity protected by Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act without restriction by the no-strike clause in the contract. A logical next step would be for unions to refuse to sign any contract containing a no-strike clause, a step that would challenge CIO contractualism at the level of its most fundamental assumptions.

Yet the overall thrust of Moody's suggestions is quite different. It is that we should elect better leaders to head existing national unions, who would finish the incomplete project of the early CIO by organizing the unorganized, democratizing union structures, restoring the pattern bargaining established by CIO unions after World War II, and starting a national labour party. In making these recommendations, Moody seems insufficiently aware of the fact that CIO unions, at all periods in their history and whatever their political colour, have regarded both organization from the bottom up and rank-and-file action on the shop floor as treasonous dual unionism. Thus the UAW, during the period 1935-1940 when Moody considers its internal life to have been 'rich and democratic', prevented its local unions at General Motors plants from forming a semi-autonomous GM council. The UAW in 1936, like CIO unions ever since, insisted that one local union wishing to communicate with another should do so *vertically* through regional or national offices of the 'international' union.

On balance, then, the project with which Moody associates himself could be described as making sure that the labour movement of the United States goes through a social-democratic phase—that is, a phase in which the majority of the work force belongs to trade unions, and those trade unions create a labour party dominated by themselves. But we should ask ourselves and him: Who wants this? What is there in the record of social democracy—where that model has been more fully fleshed out—that encourages us, as labour radicals, to devote our energies to establish it here?

A useful analogy might be the debate among Russian revolutionaries in the years between the turn of the century and World War I. Russia

had just entered a capitalist stage of development and was still governed by tsarist repression. A mechanical application of Marxism suggested that the next step must be a bourgeois democratic revolution, and that if the Russian bourgeoisie was unprepared to lead such a revolution, then revolutionary parties at the head of a workers' and peasants' coalition should do so. Trotsky, however, had a different idea. He proposed that in such an objective situation a possibility might be a 'combined development', whereby Russia would leap over or bypass the capitalist phase of development and move directly to a workers' and peasants' revolution and to the building of socialism.

A similar approach to the crisis of the labour movement in the United States would be to advocate reforms that increase workers' control over the productive process, and move toward socialism in the sense of publicly owned enterprises managed in the most decentralized and democratic way possible. Trade-union leaders may well appropriate such demands for the purpose of containing the rank and file, just as Walter Reuther appropriated planks from Trotsky's transitional programme (linking wages to prices, asking companies to open up their books) at the end of World War II. But then *they* would be helping us move toward *our* objectives, rather than we spending our lives building bureaucratic institutions for them to control.

What might this mean, specifically? What might be the content of a transitional programme for the labour movement of the 1990s? Here David Montgomery's new book offers indispensable help. In *The Fall of the House of Labor*, Montgomery more than once looks ahead to the labour movement that was to come into being with the organization of the CIO, and underlines the qualitative differences between the CIO and the labour movement in the period 1865-1925. Thus, in describing the role of the national government during World War I, he says that the consistent theme guiding its work 'was that employers should be encouraged to negotiate with legitimate unions and to shun the IWW and other groups deemed "outlaw" by the AFL. Here was the appearance in embryonic form of the doctrine of a certificated bargaining agent, which was to be incorporated into the law of the land in 1935.' And in narrating the upheaval of 1916-1922, when the IWW and the Socialist Party opposed United States entry into World War I, and entire unions, such as the miners and the railroad crafts, endorsed the nationalization of their respective industries, Montgomery comments that 'in many ways the struggles of 1916-1922... presaged those of at least the early 1930s, that is, before the founding of the Committee for Industrial Organization and the enactment of the Wagner Act.'

Montgomery identifies three characteristics of the radical labour movement of the first quarter of the twentieth century—all eminently applicable today—that distinguish that movement from the labour movement after 1935. These characteristics were elements of a composite strategy developed from below. While at a national level the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) debated the respective merits of electoral work and direct action, local activists, according to Montgomery, typically did both. Their work proceeded along three lines.

First, *the formation of elected committees in individual workplaces to stand up to the employer through direct action.* Thus at the Westinghouse plant near Pittsburgh, experience indicated that workers needed an 'in-plant organization made up of their own elected delegates' that cut across traditional craft lines. The permanent presence of an active group-representative right there on the production floor, 'all day every day,' augmented the very different kind of representation that a national union could offer. At Westinghouse, as Montgomery tells the story, workers recruited employees of all descriptions (including clerical workers) into an organization marvellously named the Allegheny Congenial Industrial Union. This organization 'copied the IWW by devoting itself to organizing struggles around demands, rather than negotiating contracts... but it also used a system of departmental delegates inside the plant as its basic structure.' The improvised shop committees that Montgomery describes may be compared to the shop-floor activities carried out in industries such as steel, auto, rubber, and electrical equipment during the early years of the CIO, at a time when unions had yet to become exclusive bargaining representatives, contracts had not been signed, and, as a result, shop stewards were still free to orchestrate slowdowns and wildcat strikes in support of their constituents' demands.

Second, *the creation of committees or councils in particular communities, in which local unions and rank-and-file groups from different workplaces can contact one another, broaden each others' consciousness, and take common action.* Of course, the official AFL-CIO central labour council purports to be just such an entity, and there are situations in which it will actually function as such. (Montgomery tells of a period in Schenectady when metal workers organized by the IWW were permitted to send delegates to the AFL trades assembly.) In other circumstances workers will have to organize new entities—parallel central labour bodies—to perform this function. Montgomery describes how at the Westinghouse plant two thousand men and women walked out when a key organizer was dismissed. By the next morning, thirteen thousand striking workers linked hands to form a huge human chain around the Westinghouse complex. Giant processions of strikers and supporters gradually closed down the whole valley. On 1 May, a parade bedecked with red flags and led by a Lithuanian band, invaded steel mills, chain works, and machinery companies, bringing out thirty-six thousand workers. 'The ethnic antagonisms that have absorbed the attention of most historians studying the region's workers seemed to melt away, as the angry and joyous tide of humanity poured through the streets.' Essentially the same thing happened in the local general strikes in Minneapolis, Toledo and San Francisco in 1934. And by whatever name—'district assemblies' in the era of the Knights of Labor, or 'Soviets' in the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, or local branches of Polish Solidarity—the bodies that coordinate such actions rely not so much on the national organization of all workers in a given craft or industry as on the solidarity of all workers in a particular locality.

Third and finally, *the organization of local labour parties leading to the development of a new national party.* This happened in the 1870s and 1880s. Rank-and-filers in different places and kinds of work, having



forged horizontal links in the mixed and district assemblies of the Knights of Labor, went on to form local labour parties. It happened again in the early twentieth century, so Montgomery recounts, when a community-based socialism sprang up among skilled craftsmen in medium-sized cities like Brockton and Haverhill, Massachusetts; Schenectady, New York; and the Tri-City area of Rock Island and Moline, Illinois, and Davenport, Iowa. There, during 1905 and 1906, the Socialist Party branches issued their own ten-cent newspaper in which they called the local John Deere plant a 'penitentiary' that set every man at his fellow worker's throat, and campaigned for the creation of kindergartens at every public school as a means of preserving the working-class family. Such 'constructive socialism' in working-class communities has been wrongly demeaned, Montgomery argues, as 'sewer socialism' reflecting bourgeois influence; for '[t]he bourgeoisie, and only they, already had good sewers.'

A national labour party built up in this way, from local labour parties formed by local central labour bodies controlled by the rank and file and sympathetic to direct action, would be something quite different from a national labour party organized from the top down by the bureaucratic leaders of unions locked into CIO contractualism.

On the whole, while Kim Moody's *An Injury to All*, is committed to rebuilding the labour movement in a spirit of solidarity, the means of struggle described by David Montgomery in his *The Fall of the House of Labor* holds out most hope for nurturing a movement based on that spirit.

## Kim Moody      A Reply to Staughton Lynd

When Staughton Lynd told me that he was writing a review of both my book, *An Injury to All*, and David Montgomery's, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, I quipped that he had put me in some fast company. After all, David Montgomery is not only an established labour historian, but widely recognized on the left as the person who turned the attention of labour historians from the minutes of AFL conventions and other such deadly documents to the thoughts and actions of rank-and-file workers. It would certainly be thrilling to keep such company, even if only in the pages of *New Left Review*.

On further reflection, however, it occurred to me that the temptation to turn a twin review into a comparative review was probably built into the project, and that what had promised to be a sort of literary night-on-the-town, might inadvertently be turned into an intellectual boxing match. This was disconcerting not only because I had no argument with the works of David Montgomery, but, frankly, because I could predict what the odds-makers would say. A Moody-Montgomery match was no match at all, even if the principals involved were not present and the whole affair took place in the closed-circuit print media of the Marxist Left. I felt the need to declare

a mismatch because I sensed that Montgomery, the author, might involuntarily be standing in for Lynd, the reviewer, in an old debate that precedes both Montgomery's *Workers' Control in America* and the two works under review. In short, I feared I was being set up for a fall in the house of labour.

When Staughton Lynd sent me an advance draft of his review my worst fears were realized. There in the first few pages of the review I was caught red-handed not having rewritten David Montgomery's thorough analysis of the old AFL. That is, there were aspects of the consciousness of AFL craft workers I had not elaborated on when I briefly stated in the introduction to the book that even much of the mutual action of nineteenth century skilled craftsmen was conducted in the name of individualism. Of course Lynd is right to point out that there were other elements to the consciousness of these craft workers. One could go even further, as David Montgomery does, in pointing to the eventual (though unsuccessful) push toward industrial unionism among many of these craft workers in the period of 1916-22. But since I was dealing with an entirely different period, I simply used the business-unionist ideology of the majority wing of the AFL leadership to draw a contrast with the ideology of modern industrial unionism. Still, I wondered why this point, which took up a few paragraphs of the book, was so central to his opening argument. After all, I did not deny that, as Montgomery has shown, these craftsmen took mutual action or, indeed, that they conducted some monumental struggles. I was simply making a point that the heart of business-unionist ideology, then and now, bows to the individualist paradigm of so much American discourse. Would Lynd really deny this?

In contrast, I pointed to the embryonic collectivism of the industrial unionism of the CIO, and of the social unionism that was its expression in its early years. To refute the distinction between business unionism and social unionism, Lynd cites the ideas and actions of a few top CIO leaders such as Philip Murray and Sidney Hillman. But social unionism was not their exclusive property. The leaders I was pointing to in the paragraph Lynd quotes at length were not simply or primarily the holy trinity of Hillman, Murray and John L. Lewis. In my view, the leaders who actually built the CIO unions were primarily those who came out of the shops. Some of these, such as the Reuther brothers, moved rapidly into regional or national positions; others remained local union leaders. In the 1930s and early 1940s, most came to hold some version of a social-unionist outlook that accorded with the industrial organizations they had built from the bottom up. Furthermore, as I point out in the book, this social unionism had its radical (even socialist) as well as its conservative variants. What most variants had in common was the belief that the 'labour movement' was more than just the unions, and that the unions themselves had a responsibility to the entire working class. Prior to the era of the CIO, this view had been limited primarily to socialists. With the emergence of industrial unionism it became the framework within which labour politics were debated and fought out, until it was twisted and eventually dismissed in the postwar period in all but rhetoric.

The project of *An Injury to All* was not to reiterate David Montgomery's work or to restate the origins of the CIO, but to explain the crisis of the contemporary US labour movement. I begin my analysis in the 1940s because it was then that the sharpest turn toward the bureaucratization, routinization and conservatization of the new CIO unions was taken, and modern business unionism formed. Thus, so far as *An Injury To All* is concerned, Lynd's opening comments strike me as being beside the point.

The heart of Lynd's real critique of *An Injury to All* appears in two sentences around the middle of the review. They are worth quoting in order to focus the disagreement. The first is: 'To begin with, *the CIO unions came into being in the context of the National Labor Relations Act as exclusive bargaining representatives certified by the state.*' The second reads, 'Further, *CIO unions were from the outset committed to contractualism, that is, to the regulation of relations between employer and employee by means of a legally binding collective bargaining agreement that (1) forbids strikes for the duration of the contract; and (2) codes management decisions to the employer.*'

Since Lynd and I are on the same side of the struggle to remake the labour movement and to create a socialist movement that is democratic, working-class based and internationalist, I do not want to exaggerate or mischaracterize the differences. Lynd is not only conscious of working-class self-activity as a key element in social change, but plays an active role in encouraging it. But the difference in analysis is significant, because it points toward a difference in perspective for dealing with labour's current crisis.

Lynd's view of the condition of unions in the USA today as in the past, rests on the institutional framework defined by the National Labor Relations Act and the union contract. The point of view that I attempt to argue and elaborate in *An Injury to All* sees the crisis of US labour today as stemming primarily from (a) the weaknesses built into the modern business unionism that emerged from the 1940s (of which contractual fetishism is one aspect); (b) an interaction of the changing balance of class forces (which determines the effectiveness of the institutions Lynd describes); and (c) the conscious actions of the employers, labour leadership, and the rank and file among others. Underlying the changing balance of class forces are both vast economic changes and the conscious and unconscious actions of the major players.

### The Wagner Act

Lynd presents material showing that many people at the time suspected that the Wagner Act, or National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), was meant to discourage strikes and institutionalize labour disputes in the hope of establishing predictable labour relations and labour peace. No argument here. But the bigger question is, did the law itself accomplish this, or did it, for that matter, even have a clear means of guaranteeing the idyll of labour peace that its author, Senator Robert

Wagner, sought? Looking at the various periods of labour history since the law came into force, the answer seems to me to be No. It did not stop labour upheaval in the second half of the 1930s or even during the war. Furthermore, as Christopher Tomlins shows in his exhaustive study of the Wagner Act and its early interpretations, *The State and the Unions*, the meaning of this vague law was not even clear until after the war. To be sure, the 1947 Taft-Hartley amendments to it provided specific and important limitations by outlawing secondary boycotts and sympathy strikes, and by allowing states to prohibit the union shop. It is also indisputable that the body of case-law since the Boys Market decision of 1970 has further restricted the legal use of the strike or of mass picketing, and has exposed unions to crippling fines. But most of these developments occurred after the formative period under debate here, and were, I would argue, more a reflection of changes in the balance of class forces than their cause.

As Nelson Lichtenstein shows in *Labor's War at Home*, on which I confess I drew heavily, it was not so much the Wagner Act but the active intervention of government through the War Labor Board and other emergency agencies during World War II that shaped much of the contract law and shop-floor 'jurisprudence' we associate with postwar bureaucratic business unionism. What struck me as important about the period from 1942 to 1950 was precisely the ineffectiveness of the normal legal channels established under the Wagner Act—the repeated need for the government to intervene directly, on the one hand, and the CIO leadership to consolidate the goals of this intervention through the elaboration of bureaucratic, centralizing structures within the union, on the other hand.

As I argue in *An Injury to All*, the political alliance of the top CIO leaders with the Democratic Party and the Roosevelt Administration was also crucial. As Lynd points out in the review, there was implicit opposition to this in the form of labour-party movements in the 1930s. As I show in my book, there were more explicit challenges to this arrangement throughout the 1940s. In interpreting the NLRB during these years, the courts and the NLRB predictably lent their (often contradictory and usually post facto) support to the social contract that finally emerged in the late 1940s, but the policies and actions of the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations played a more direct role in shaping labour's options. In this political drama, Hillman, for example, became a virtual agent of Roosevelt inside the CIO leadership, attempting to impose 'order' in labour relations. Even then, the government was only partially successful in taming either labour or the majority of employers who failed to see the benefits of contractual unionism. To see the law as the determining factor in shaping modern business unionism is to write out of history the major struggles that occurred between the rank and file and the bureaucracy, the various political tendencies, and, of course, capital and labour.

On the other side of the legal equation, we see that in the last twenty years the NLRB has provided no peace-keeping function in the face of a deteriorating balance of class forces where capital sought to break the social contract. In short, the law and its efficacy are largely a

function of the balance of class forces and the actions of major players. For some time now, as it happens, capital has shown less interest in peace per se than in increased flexibility in the labour process and in labour costs. It views much of the union contract as a barrier to this, and resists unions altogether when it has a choice. Even so institutionally oriented an observer as Richard Freeman stated in Congressional testimony on the failure of US labour law that the major factor was 'increased employer resistance'. The same is true of the direction of court decisions since 1970. The determining power of the law itself is quite limited. Forceful state intervention is, of course, another matter.

It is also worth noting that big capital's favourite road to flexibility in the workplace—the various labour–management cooperation schemes (team concept, quality of work life, 'jointness,' and so forth)—is patently incompatible with the limited adversarial assumptions of the Wagner Act (NLRA). That is, in many respects these programmes deliberately blur the distinction between management and the union—a practice expressly forbidden by the law. This legal conundrum bothers neither the employers, nor the courts, nor the labour bureaucracy.

### Contractual Unionism

Much the same can be said of the force of contractual unionism. No one would deny that there is a trade-off built into contractual unionism, or that as contract enforcement was centralized during World War II it contributed to the bureaucratization of the new CIO unions. But it should be understood that written contracts were as much a demand and function of rank-and-file self-activity in the 1930s and 1940s as sit-down or 'quickie' strikes, stewards' organization, seniority, or the egalitarian urges that created industrial unionism. The first contracts were very basic documents that generally included union recognition, a plant-level grievance procedure, and later basic wage scales. Typically, they were one year in duration. The four-step grievance procedure that put matters in the hands of the central leadership was a wartime innovation. The multi-year contract came even later. Most contracts did not contain no-strike clauses until after the war. Lynd's examples of GM and US Steel are, somewhat, exceptions for the prewar years. While the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (CIO precursors of the United Steelworkers of America) generally favoured no-strike clauses, other unions did not. In the automobile industry, Chrysler workers forced the removal of such a clause in 1939.\*

To understand why industrial production workers demanded written contracts from the start, it is important to realize that they did not have the options available to the turn-of-the-century craftsmen described by Lynd. (It is also worth noting that the turn-of-the-century craftsmen often had, and generally sought, contracts.) For the first and second generation of production workers in mass-production industry, such questions as job demarcation and work rules were not

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\* For some interesting material on this, see Steve Jeffries, 'Matters of Mutual Interest', in Lichtenstein and Meyer, *On The Line*, 1989.

a legacy of artisanal labour. They had to be created anew, in the framework of machine-driven production, Taylorism, employee representation schemes, and the new personnel management that Montgomery discusses in *The Fall of the House of Labor*. In the 1930s the contract and the grievance procedure became a means of codifying informal protective practices and creating new ones. Although the CIO leaders eventually fought to remove this power from the shop floor, the practice of using the contract and the grievance procedure to achieve a measure of control was an essential aspect of worker self-activity in a new industrial context. It was as much an expression of working-class self-organization as the craft mutualism of an earlier era. Though it does not come through in Lynd's review, much of the first third of *An Injury to All* is devoted to chronicling and analysing the struggle to centralize and bureaucratize contract and grievance administration. Neither the contract nor the NLRA handed the central leadership this administrative control; they had to fight for it and met continuous resistance in the process.

Lynd's institutional view is ultimately of a piece with Michel's 'iron law of oligarchy', the Weberian institutionalists, and the 'maturity school' of the 1950s and 1960s in the USA. Like the Weberians, he sees the legal and institutional factors that usually reflect one moment in history or one conjuncture in the balance of class forces, as independently determining forces in the development of working-class self-activity. The proposition that contracts limit the actions of the workers, however, is not much of a guide to the direction of working-class activity, past or present. All arrangements, including the absence of a union contract, limit workers' self-activity in one way or another. The privilege of ownership and capitalist social relations ensure that this is so, regardless of the institutional arrangement of the moment.

The promise of the working class as an agent of social change is that it constantly seeks new channels for its self-activity and control, and new paths to circumvent existing limits, institutional and otherwise. To place the contract somehow above the realm of this human action and class interaction is to miss the dual character of class relations in the workplace. The US labour contract, the informal agreements that used to prevail in much of British industry, and the more politicized national agreements in Germany and Scandinavia were all truces in the class struggle. But they invariably existed side by side with the constant guerrilla warfare of workplace life. In US industry the contract both limits this warfare and facilitates it. More accurately, different aspects of the typical labour contract limit or facilitate different forms of struggle and resistance. While this is a complex phenomenon, a fair summary might be that the protective features of the contract and the grievance procedure provide a legitimizing focus around which to conduct resistance or organize struggle. Most socialists and many union militants have always opposed no-strike and management-rights clauses. They have also opposed one of the most debilitating aspects of shop-floor jurisprudence: the fact that workers are guilty until proven innocent. At the same time, they have attempted to seize upon what is useful in the existing set-up.

A contemporary American example of this approach can be found in the work of the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), a rank-and-file organization that Lynd has been critical of, but has also aided at times. TDU not only fights for a more democratic union structure, but has always helped Teamsters set up and maintain workplace struggles and organizations. It has produced an impressive body of experience in the use of existing contracts and work rules to extend or defend rights, but it also proposes changes in the terrain on which many of these disputes are fought out. For example, in its 'Rank & File Bill of Rights', TDU calls for 'A FAIR GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE. Innocent until proven guilty, right to remain on the job until final procedure completed. Grievance procedure should include right to a speedy trial, arbitration by peers, and the right to strike if necessary.'

For Lynd, however, the existing institutional framework is immutable. Since the inevitabilities it is presumed to contain are now a given, it is difficult to imagine how workers are to change things. Lynd rejects union reform movements like TDU as one possible means of change. The escape Lynd appears to suggest is some unpredictable upheaval that will transcend all 'social democratic' and 'contractualist' phases of consciousness or attempts to revitalize existing labour organizations. But, if we learn anything from the history of working-class people and the organizations they develop, it is that such upheavals are the product of much preliminary day-to-day work, organizing and conceptualizing of the meaning of this activity.

Furthermore, the new labour historiography seems to tell us that working people attempting to shape their lives grasp at existing institutions and attempt to mould them to their newer circumstances. Much of the material in *The Fall of the House of Labor* points to this sort of preliminary self-activity, including the 'pre-history' of industrial unionism in the mass-production and/or nationally organized industries. It also points to the growing national sweep of labour struggles, from the coal mines, through the railroads, to the first mass organizing attempts in meat packing and steel. Lynd's favoured examples, however, emphasize localized activity. One would hardly know from his account that a major theme in *The Fall of the House of Labor* is precisely the broadening of the class consciousness of both certain skilled workers and the newer factory 'operatives'. Lynd's mutualist craftsmen are more those of Montgomery's earlier *Workers Control in America* than of the book under review. This selection is, I believe, a function of Lynd's own current perspective.

### Lynd's Two Strategies

Lynd counterposes what he sees as today's 'two alternative strategies: the one, building up local bodies of workers drawn from different trades into instruments capable of supporting one another and running local labour candidates; the other focuses on electing new leaders to existing national unions.' In the first place, neither of these alleged alternatives amounts to a total strategy. In the second place, there is nothing contradictory or counterposed in these two forms of working-

class self-activity. While individual activists have to make choices about the emphasis of their own activities, a social movement capable of building a new labour movement in this era must incorporate many forms of struggle and organization. The workers of the 1980s or 1990s will not struggle or organize in the local context of the turn-of-the-century machinist. Shop-floor or localized mutualism will lead nowhere in today's global economy unless it is connected in some way to a broader movement. This would not simply mean locally based, cross-union mutual support organizations and rank-and-file organizations in local and national unions (not just to elect new leaders, but to alter the structure and practice of the unions). It would also include worker-led community organizations fighting on such questions as plant closures, housing and education; as well as organizations of working-class minorities and women in unions and communities, and campaigns and new structures for international solidarity. It is the embryos of these kinds of struggle and organization that the final third of *An Injury to All* analyses and attempts to link as the basis for developing a rounded perspective. Lynd, who is active in some of these forms of activity and supportive of others, appears to be a prisoner of his own analysis when he counterposes two elements of such a perspective.

Political action is another key aspect of this point of view; and here I feel that Lynd has implicitly mischaracterized what I wrote about a labour party. He begins the review by suggesting that I am proposing a 'social-democratic' future for American labour. This, of course, is a very bad thing to propose, and no decent Marxist would wish to be caught doing so, even privately among consenting adults. What Lynd says he means by this is 'a phase in which the majority of the work force belongs to trade unions and those trade unions create a labour party dominated by themselves.' It is a surprise to me that advocating organization of the unorganized into democratized or even newly formed unions is 'social-democratic'. Even the IWW advocated universal unionization. As for the question of a labour party, who would deny that such a break with the Democratic Party would be an enormous step forward for the US working class? Not Lynd. He is for it, and spells out the way he thinks it should be done. Drawing on *The Fall of the House of Labor*, he talks of craft workers using the old Socialist Party as a means of urban improvement and working-class empowerment at the municipal level in the years from 1900 to 1922. He cites Montgomery's warning not to dismiss this activity as 'sewer socialism'. Yet this political activity was certainly conducted within the framework of classically social-democratic institutions—proving that one person's 'social democracy' can be another's means of grasping at workers' power.

While my views on how such a development might happen in the USA are somewhat different from Lynd's, they do not embrace the position that he appears to attribute to me at the end of the review when he denounces 'a national labor party organized from the top down by the bureaucratic leaders of unions locked into CIO contractualism.' That version of a labour party is explicitly rejected in *An Injury to All* (pp. 344–5). What is advocated, in addition to the kinds of local political



campaigns Lynd suggests, and with which I concur, is that the Black community—which is overwhelmingly working class—and the forces that were drawn to the campaigns of Jesse Jackson, might play a role in catalysing a new party. This is not a prediction but a 'catalyzing' vision that is quite independent of the actions or aspirations of Jackson himself. One could dismiss the consciousness of Jackson's social base as merely 'populist', but it would be wiser to follow David Montgomery's caveat and see this, like much other 'reformist' working-class activity, as part of the search for power. It seems to me that by characterizing one side of the debate as 'social-democratic', Lynd both exaggerates the differences and obscures possible areas of agreement. Since there are points of convergence, as well as of divergence, among those struggling to find a viable path for working-class empowerment, a constructive first step in this debate might be to drop the use of political expletives such as 'social-democratic'.

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## In Defence of Rational Choice: A Reply to Ellen Meiksins Wood

Ellen Meiksins Wood has delivered a sweeping broadside against the idea that Rational Choice Marxism (RCM) might hoist a standard around which the intellectual forces of the left could rally.<sup>1</sup> Many of her arguments regarding the limitations of RCM I accept (indeed, some of them I have voiced myself), others I reject, and yet others seem directed against a target I cannot recognize in myself, or any of the other writers whom Wood despatches with such unrelenting hostility.

Much of what I will say records the conclusions of a more detailed study into the agenda raised by Wood, forthcoming in *Social Division*.<sup>2</sup> In the course of writing the book, I have moved somewhat from the position I argued in the 1986 NLR article Wood begins by attacking, but I have not been taken over in the manner she ends up predicting: by a 'contradictory amalgam' of super-rationalist RCM with post-structuralist irrationalism marked by 'political voluntarism, where rhetoric and discourse are the agencies of social change, and a cynical defeatism, where every radical programme of change is doomed to failure'.<sup>3</sup> Quite the reverse; I have found, sometimes to my pleasant surprise, that analytical Marxist theory is considerably stronger than I had previously thought, and that while rational-choice forms of micro-explanation remain an indispensable point of reference for radical social theory, they can and should be supplemented by other kinds and levels of social explanation. It is unclear whether this sort of adaptation would be congenial to Wood for, although the adaptation is motivated by many of the kinds of criticisms she levels against RCM, she nowhere in her article indicates what her alternative theory to RCM would be. The closest she gets to a statement of any alternative lies in her remark that 'the most distinctive feature of historical materialism... is... a focus (such as that which characterizes the

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'Rational Choice Marxism: Is the Game Worth the Candle?', NLR 177, September–October 1989, pp. 41–88 (hereafter Wood).

<sup>2</sup> Alan H. Carling, *Social Division*, Verso, London, forthcoming 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Wood, p. 88. The original article, 'Rational Choice Marxism', NLR 160, November–December 1986, pp. 24–62, is now available in Mark Cowling and Laurence Wilde, eds., *Approaches to Marx*, Milton Keynes 1989.

most complete and systematic of Marx's own works, his actual practice in the critique of political economy and the analysis of capitalism) on the specificity of every mode of production, its endogenous logic of process, its own laws of motion, its characteristic crises—to use Brenner's formula, its own rules of reproduction.<sup>4</sup> I find it particularly odd that Wood should recruit Brenner in this way to the defence of the good and the true against the horrors of RCM, when, as I shall shortly explain, Brenner is himself one of the foremost exponents of the rational-choice approach to historical explanation.

To begin with, though, I am happy to second Wood's complaint that rational-choice explanation suffers from the limitation that it does not explain what it treats as a presupposition of its explanations. And since the presuppositions often include (1) the preferences of the actor, and (2) the social context in which the actor acts, rational-choice explanation often does not explain either the preferences or the social context of the actor.<sup>5</sup>

But I deny this means that rational-choice explanations explain nothing. Wood's criticism along these lines on pp. 48–9 smacks of everythingism. Everythingism is an unfortunate strain of Marxian thought which seems to hold, roughly, that you need a complete explanation of something before you can have any explanation of something. Thus 'the compulsions of capital accumulation cannot be derived simply from the "optimizing strategies" of a rational individual with capital assets. These compulsions cannot be explained without reference to the competitive pressures of the capitalist market, indeed the whole historically constituted social structure which has made individuals in capitalist society uniquely dependent on the market for the conditions of their self-reproduction and hence subject to the imperatives of competition and accumulation.'<sup>6</sup> No doubt Wood's point would stand, if one were aiming for an utterly exhaustive explanation of the compulsive phenomena in question, but to require such a complete explanation is to require something that is virtually impossible to obtain—either for RCM or any *other* kind of social theory, 'conventional historical materialism' included. In practice, we all get along as best we can—one bit of explanation at a time.

### General and Special Theories

I tried to tackle this problem, no doubt very imperfectly, by taking a

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<sup>4</sup> Wood, p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> I know of no RCM theorist who would dispute this point, which is for example the main burden of John Roemer's ' "Rational Choice" Marxism: Some issues of method and substance', in John Roemer, ed., *Analytical Marxism*, Cambridge 1986; and is considered at length in Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, Cambridge 1985, ch. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Wood pp. 48–9. Everythingism was endemic among the Hunders/Hirst school in its Marxian heyday, when one had to explain the conditions of existence of some item before one could explain the item. And we all know that every condition of existence itself has conditions of existence. . . . An indecently open brand of everythingism is still current in Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, *Knowledge and Class*, Chicago 1987. This paragraph was improved by a suggestion from Graham Macdonald.

lead from Engels and distinguishing general theories from special theories. Special theories take for granted preferences and/or social contexts, whereas general theories attempt to explain preferences and/or social contexts.<sup>7</sup> It should be clear that general explanations are inherently more difficult to achieve than special explanations, and also that rational-choice is adapted mostly to the requirements of special explanation.<sup>8</sup> Whether one judges the contribution of rational-choice explanation harshly or kindly will therefore tend to depend on whether you require your theory to explain either (1) the preferences of actors and/or the social context in which actors act, or (2) the actors' actions, given their preferences and social contexts of action. The verdict in this judgement will inevitably vary from application to application. Since historical materialism is often concerned with the consequences of the fact that 'mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing', I do not regard the failure to explain the preferences people have regarding the provision of such items as a serious handicap of the theory.<sup>9</sup> I believe, and argue at greater length in the book, that this is not the case with preferences, for example, of a racist or sexist character. I consequently regard as useful but rather limited all the special theories of discrimination which presuppose the existence of such preferences.<sup>10</sup>

Now turn to the question of the social context within which rational action occurs (on the basis of unmysterious preferences for comfort, survival and so on). As far as Marxist theory is concerned, the relevant background context is supplied by property relations. So a Marxian special theory will take for granted a certain regime of property relations, and ask what interaction occurs given the property relations. A general theory will take on the more ambitious task of explaining the existence of the given type of property relation.

Does Wood reject this way of carving up the domain of Marxian theories? I am not sure. In the quotation cited above she speaks highly of the aim to analyse 'the specificity of every mode of production, its endogenous logic of process, its own laws of motion, its characteristic crises.' This seems to be just the recipe for a special theory of each mode of production as I have recommended (a 'logic of process' *given* certain social relations). Indeed, she goes so far as to say this is 'the

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<sup>7</sup> Engels contrasted Marx's discovery of 'the special law of motion governing the present-day capitalist mode of production' with his discovery of the 'law of development of human history', during his 'Speech at the Graveyard of Karl Marx', in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, New York 1972, p. 603.

<sup>8</sup> I no longer think that rational choice is confined to special explanations (that is, I reject Elsterian methodological individualism). In my book I distinguish between general theories that appear to take the form of rational-choice theories, and general theories that really are rational-choice theories. The latter must involve collective actors. But not all general explanations are rational-choice explanations, so not all general explanations involve collective actors.

<sup>9</sup> Engels, 'Speech at the Graveyard of Karl Marx', p. 603.

<sup>10</sup> Such as those of Gary Becker, *The Economics of Discrimination*, Chicago, 1971; and John Roemer, 'Divide and Conquer', *Bell Journal of Economics*, vol. 10, no. 2, Autumn 1979. A parallel point applies to any critique of capitalism which dwells on the irrational character of the needs it inspires.

distinctive feature of historical materialism', which might be taken to imply that historical materialism should not dabble in general theories at all. On the other hand, she seems to reject Roemer's special theory of capitalism on grounds that would rule out most attempts to create special theories for any mode of production: "The essential feature of [his] theory is its focus on what Roemer calls "property relations". What he means by "property relations" is the distribution of assets or endowments, not the social relations of production and appropriation as Marxism commonly understands them.' Roemer's is 'a conception in which the analytic starting point is *inequality* or the 'unequal distribution of assets' instead of a (historically constituted) *social relation* between appropriators and producers.'<sup>11</sup>

What this seems to suggest is that we are not allowed to analyse the connection between, on the one hand, the distribution of assets or endowments, and on the other hand, the differential existences of employers and employees, with attendant relationships of class exploitation. It is as if we must take in capitalism at one glance—as a system of unequal property and as a system of unequal work—without inquiring into the 'logic of process' which connects the two. This is an unsustainable position, and Wood does not sustain it, because she later says 'wage-labourers in capitalism, lacking the means to carry on their own labour, only acquire them by entering into an exploitative relation with capital.'<sup>12</sup> Quite so, and they enter into that '(historically constituted) *social relation* between appropriators and producers' precisely because of their respective standings in a schedule of Roemerian 'property relations'—namely, their effective control or lack of effective control over means of production.

Now one might argue, as I think Wood does argue at the foot of p. 53, that this is a pretty degenerate instance of rational choice, because direct producers who are utterly bereft of means of production are forced to work for capitalists on pain of starvation, and one doesn't need the formal paraphernalia of multivariate geometry to reach that conclusion. This may be so, but capitalism is not always like that, and Roemer's results show that the fundamental insight is remarkably well preserved as one's model of capitalism becomes more complex. There is a precise calibration of employment status with position in the property structure at a competitive equilibrium of a market economy for a very wide range of preferences, including (1) the subsistence preferences Wood's argument evidently has in mind; (2) accumulation preferences, which attribute value to money other than as a means merely of avoiding work; and (3) many combinations of subsistence with accumulation preferences, as the balance between the two is allowed to vary with the level of the assets a person possesses.<sup>13</sup>

Roemer's work suggests that capitalism is of a piece, from its

<sup>11</sup> Wood, pp. 46, 48.

<sup>12</sup> Wood, p. 53, and cf. the statement at the top of p. 60 about when 'class enters the picture'.

<sup>13</sup> The technical issue on this point is resolved by Roemer in *Value, Exploitation and Class*, London 1986, p. 50.

apparently most benign and free-wheeling to its most vicious and oppressive varieties.<sup>4</sup> And for that conclusion, it is unfortunately necessary to appeal to matrix algebra. In her anxiety to deny the importance of Roemer's work, Wood drives herself into an absurd corner. She says 'let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Roemer has succeeded on his own terms in constructing a foolproof demonstration that capitalism is exploitative and unjust, without resorting to the labour theory of value. How does this procedure affect the larger project of reconstructing Marxist theory?'<sup>5</sup> Are you kidding?

'Foolproof' is not perhaps quite the right word, since no question involving justice is ever going to be foolproof in the way that a mathematical demonstration is foolproof; but given Wood's assumption of foolproofness, how on earth could it fail to be significant for Marxist theory that every introductory tome of neoclassical economics, and every pronouncement on the radio about monetarism, should now contain a solemn section explaining in a foolproof way why free market capitalism is an inherently exploitative system?

### Brenner's Contribution

To argue thus for Roemer is not of course to argue that Marxist theory needs nothing other than Roemer. It also needs Brenner. Brenner adds to Roemer's special theory of capitalism at least two other special theories: (1) a static theory of feudalism; (2) a dynamic theory of capitalism; together with (3) the outline of a dynamic theory of feudalism. The first two theories are usefully brought together in a single statement that is worth calling 'Brenner's Axiom', as follows:

*Brenner's Axiom:* Short of socialism, capitalist property relations are necessary and sufficient for sustained technological development.

The two parts of the Axiom are each supported by rational-choice reasoning:

- (i) *Sufficiency.* Given capitalist property relations, the incentives push all rational actors in the direction of specialization, innovation and accumulation. Hence technological development occurs.
- (ii) *Necessity.* Given pre-capitalist property relations (in particular, feudal property relations), the incentives faced by all rational actors militate against specialization, innovation and accumulation. Hence technological stagnation occurs.

The upshot of Brenner's Axiom is that in order to get development going, you need capitalism first. I give in passing a restatement of the Axiom in pregnant language: feudalism fetters the development of the forces of production; capitalism fosters their development.

The rational-choice argument behind the two parts of the Axiom runs,

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<sup>4</sup> This is intended as a summary statement. In the book, I argue that some forms of capitalism are more unacceptable than others.

<sup>5</sup> Wood, p. 47.

very briefly, as follows. Under capitalism, actors specialize etc. because (1) they have no options outside the market and (2) the logic of competitive price equilibrium makes survival in the marketplace depend on a constant stream of cost-cutting specializations, innovations and accumulations. Under feudalism, on the other hand, peasants do not specialize etc. because markets are too unreliable, and their subsistence needs are met outside the market. But neither do feudal lords specialize etc. because they have the non-market option of increasing their revenues by stepping up their coercive exactions from the peasantry. Since no significant feudal actor has the incentive to specialize etc., no systematic technological development occurs under feudalism.<sup>16</sup>

### A Theory of History?

So far, we have, let us assume, three Marxian rational-choice theories of the special variety: Roemer's theory of capitalist class division and exploitation; Brenner's theory of capitalist technological dynamism; and Brenner's theory of feudal technological stagnation. Do these theories together amount to a general theory of history? I had noted my puzzlement on this question, and of Roemer's views on this question, in a review article of Roemer's *From Feudalism to Capitalism*, which Wood has taken as an entrée into her discussion of the question of historical explanation: 'In general, Carling has struck more or less the right note by drawing a line between RCM's efforts to construct a theory of exploitation and class, and its attempts to establish a connection with a theory of history borrowed from elsewhere.'<sup>17</sup> The reader familiar with the tenor of Wood's prior remarks about RCM in general, and this author in particular, will understand that I came across this passage as a long cool draught to one dying of thirst.

The key to this question is Cohen, and the puzzlement is this: Wood suggests, and she is quite right to do so, that if Rational Choice Marxism is a bandwagon, it shows an alarming tendency to shed its passengers.<sup>18</sup> I was very well aware in the original article that the Rational Choice prescription fitted some of its intended victims better than others. Roemer, Elster, Przeworski and, I believe, Brenner are definitely 'in'. Erik Wright, Van Parijs and Van der Veen have sociological interests which tend to qualify their adherence. Geras wanted straight off the bus. But where, precisely, did Cohen fit in? On the one hand, Cohen's work has more than any other inspired the whole theoretical tendency. On the other hand, his substantive interests lie either in political philosophy or in the general theory of history, for

<sup>16</sup> This is an abrupt précis of the detailed argument in Robert Brenner, 'The Social Basis of Economic Development', in *Analytical Marxism*; and T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, Cambridge 1985. I think Brenner must be regarded as a rational-choice theorist, even if Wood thinks he is not (p. 42) and even if Brenner thinks he is not (which requires the argument I devote to the question in the book).

<sup>17</sup> Wood, p. 60, referring to Alan Carling, 'Liberty, Equality, Community', *NLR* 171, September–October, 1988, pp. 89–112.

<sup>18</sup> Wood, pp. 42–5.



which he regards as indispensable a functional, not a rational-choice, logic of explanation. Yet his reconstruction of the general theory also appeals to economic rationality—in the form of a general human interest in the increased level of development of the forces of production (at least in the range of history that concerns us here). On this basis, I felt justified in enlisting Cohen to membership of RCM, aware that the precise relationship of his general theory to the special theories of Roemer and Brenner required a more careful elucidation than I was then able to give. I later became aware also that Brenner had specifically repudiated Cohen's version of the theory of history, in a rather disconcerting footnote of the *Analytical Marxism* volume, which has the author of Chapter 2 blithely announcing that he has no time at all for the theory proudly set out by the author of Chapter 1.<sup>29</sup> Anyone who thought that Analytical Marxism consisted of a tightly-knit group of theoretically motivated persons need have read no further.

### Brenner plus Roemer versus Cohen plus Roemer

If Brenner and Cohen are indeed incompatible, it would seem that one is forced to choose *either* Brenner plus Roemer (who contribute between them at least three methodologically consistent rational-choice special theories of different aspects of feudalism and capitalism) *or* Cohen plus Roemer (a package consisting of a rational-choice special theory of capitalism in a somewhat uneasy relationship with a functional general theory of history). The latter combination is the one adopted by Roemer in *Free to Lose*. Wood's discussion of the various compatibilities within the Cohen–Roemer–Brenner triangle contains many telling points. It is the strongest section of her critique, but it is strangely inconclusive. In the end, she seems to come down in favour of Brenner, against both Cohen and Roemer, to whom she seems to wish a plague on both their houses.<sup>30</sup> But in doing so she misrecognizes the character of Brenner's theory, not only because she does not allow that it is a rational-choice theory (which would draw it closer in spirit to Roemer's theory than she might find comfortable), but because she havers as to whether Brenner's theory is a general or a special theory. On p. 66 she commends 'Brenner's primary purpose . . . precisely to break the prevailing habit of begging the central historical question, the practice of assuming the existence of the very thing whose emergence needs to be explained.' Thus, Brenner's purpose should be to explain, within the framework of a general theory of history, how capitalist property relations emerge from a feudal past. But three pages later she says: 'Certainly lords and peasants make 'rational choices' (what serious historian would deny this?) but those choices occur within the existing relations. Indeed, they are aimed not at attaining the next, more attractive historical stage (which the parties involved cannot, in any case, anticipate) but at the *reproduction* of existing conditions.' Here she seems to endorse what I have said

<sup>29</sup> Brenner, in *Analytical Marxism*, note 13, p. 46 . . . and 47 . . . and 48.

<sup>30</sup> Wood, pp. 57–72, which concludes . . . 'It is just here, in its fundamentally ahistorical character and in its hostility to historical specificity, that RCM has most in common with Cohen's technological determinism.'

about Brenner's model of feudalism: that it is part of a special theory, which shows how lords and peasants will act, given the incentive structures built into feudal property relations. But the juxtaposition of the quotations shows also what is the limit of Brenner's work as a contribution to the theory of history. If feudalism as a system is stuck in a permanent quagmire of stagnation, how does it ever manage to give birth to capitalism? To accept Brenner's statement as the final word at this point is effectively to abandon the search for a general theory of history, and thus to abandon 'conventional historical materialism', as this is conventionally understood.

### Brenner plus Cohen

My own thinking on this question has changed in a somewhat optimistic direction. I have come to believe that it is possible to synthesize Cohen with Brenner on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, despite the fact that Brenner is insistent that one can't. This means that Analytical Marxism can indeed assemble a formidable package of historical explanation, coupled with a far-reaching critique of the 'logic of process' of capitalist social relations. It may be possible to have Cohen plus Brenner plus Roemer. And it is because I have reached this conclusion that I am both more impressed than I was about the overall viability of Marxist theory, and less partisan than I used to be on behalf of Rational Choice Theory, because I now see that functional explanation has an independent role to play in the historical explanation of the transition to capitalism (and probably in other applications outside the Marxist theory of history). The question automatically arises: what is this alleged synthesis of Cohen with Brenner? I will give the briefest synopsis, hoping the reader can accept that a more adequate discussion will become available in my book.

I mentioned above that Brenner has a special theory of feudalism, which predicts technological stagnation given feudal relations of production. I also mentioned that he has the outline of a dynamic theory of feudalism as well. By this I mean a theory of the long demographic cycle of Malthusian boom and slump. It is *because* the overall level of agricultural productivity is stagnant under feudal relations that the society is condemned to endure the long waves of population growth followed by catastrophic famine, disease and decline: fettering leads to festering. According to the synthesis I propose, the key factor in the transition to capitalism is the *outcome of the slump phase of the feudal demographic cycle*. The slump creates an internal frontier, in which unused means of production—above all, land—become there for the taking. Who gets the land, under what conditions of labour, is determined by a local balance of class forces, of the type Brenner analyses with such a majestic comparative sweep, across Europe East and West.

The possible outcomes one can call France, England and Poland. In France the peasants get the land, and have no incentive towards technological development because they can remain self-sufficiently aloof from market forces. In Poland the lords get the land and dominate the peasants. They impose a second serfdom, with concomitant feudal

stagnation. In England alone, the lords get the land and the peasants get the peasants. This means that in England alone, both the direct producers and the ruling class have no alternative but to become enmeshed in market relations, with the consequences for economic development predicted by the sufficiency claim of Brenner's Axiom. Once capitalism is established in the English countryside, England can break out of the feudal demographic cycle, and eventually the comparative advantage it enjoys enables capitalism to spread, overturning feudalism in the process. Moreover, there is bound to be an 'English' outcome sometime, somewhere, to the class struggle in the trough of the demographic cycle, given the decentralized character of feudal Europe. Capitalism is inevitable, in short, because there'll always be an 'England'.

But this is to say that capitalism comes about when and because it would foster the development of the forces of production. Which is what Cohen says the functional theory of history says. Q.E.D.

### The Politics of RCM

At one point, Wood admits that 'the striking resemblance between RCM and [a] liberal-empiricist ideal-type [of theory] does not, of course, guarantee that all, or any, RCMists must subscribe to the relevant political doctrines; but the analogy is at least suggestive.'<sup>21</sup> It is a pity that in her polemics against RCM she proceeds by ignoring the absence of her guarantee, and attributes positions to members of the school that she apparently feels they ought to have adopted, if only they could have had the nous to follow through the logic of the bourgeois philistinism inherent in their apology for a general approach. Her attitude is doubly unfortunate, because she seems to ignore in this process of deduction the explicit statements on the connections between explanatory theory and political values, which have been more prominent in the work of Analytical Marxists than of some other currents that might be mentioned. This point bears on my reaction to the following canard: 'the RCM corpus leaves the impression of a very limited mental universe confined within an opulent Northern capitalism and even there constricted by a remarkable insensitivity to the irrationalities and destructive effects of capitalist accumulation.'<sup>22</sup>

Wood does not seem to have realized that the self-avowed inspiration for Roemer's work was the attempt to understand Eastern state socialism, not Western capitalism; or appreciated the significance for our understanding of the dependence of the Third World on the First, of Roemer's Theory of Imperialism through Trade. And she cannot have followed the more recent writings in which Roemer has argued for a very radical form of welfare egalitarianism, whose scope extends far south of the US border with Mexico.<sup>23</sup> Nor does she seem to have

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<sup>21</sup> Wood, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Wood, p. 75

<sup>23</sup> John Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*, Cambridge, Mass. 1982, Introduction; 'Equality of Talent', *Economics and Philosophy*, 1, 1985, pp. 151-87; and 'Equality of Resources implies Equality of Welfare', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1986, pp. 751-84.

digested the final chapter of Cohen's great book, in which he switches the attack on contemporary capitalism from the orthodox idea that it fetters the forces of production, to the idea precisely that it distorts them because of the bias that exists under capitalist relations of production to produce beyond the point at which human needs are served.<sup>24</sup>

I also find curious Wood's treatment of my own excursions into political values. What I said about bourgeois freedom in the original *NLR* article was that market freedom was some kind of freedom, and that socialists who denied that proposition (such, apparently, as Wood) have a responsibility to say what their conception of freedom is, that has no place for market freedom. In the second article I supported the fairly straightforward idea developed in Norman's book that choice is fundamental to freedom.<sup>25</sup> One could infer Thatcherite conclusions from this proposition only if one thought that capitalism alone could create choice, and thus that bourgeois freedom was freedom *tout court*. I hope Wood does not believe in this way that socialism is inherently unfree, because if so she seems to be writing for the wrong journal. Yet those misrepresentations about freedom are as nothing compared with her attribution to me of the view that 'Socialism is simply a quantitative improvement, an extension of capitalist freedom and equality.'<sup>26</sup> Capitalist equality? I thought the whole point about Roemer's work and the RCM preoccupation with the concept of exploitation was the indictment of capitalist inequality. The entire moral-cum-explanatory theory turns on the relationships among unequal resources, unequal behaviour and unequal welfare. Elsewhere in the article, Wood does not miss the implied contrast of *socialist* equality with capitalist *inequality*, because she criticizes Roemer for building it into his theory.<sup>27</sup>

### The Rational Choice Actor

I suspect that the real bone of contention in this area arises not from distributive principles but from the conception of the rational actor: the fact that rational-choice theory treats individuals as equal in the way it gifts each actor with the capacity for rational action, given variable endowments.<sup>28</sup> Strictly speaking, the objection would not be to the fact that all actors are treated alike, but to the feature all actors have in common which enables them all to be treated alike—namely the capacity for rational action. This rational creature spawned of capitalism allegedly remains a bourgeois actor (sometimes a petty-bourgeois actor), even if she or he is placed in a non-capitalist environment.<sup>29</sup> And if the rational actor has this thoroughly reactionary character, the left must be vigilant against its incursion on to the sacred territory of Marx.

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<sup>24</sup> G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Oxford 1978, ch. II.

<sup>25</sup> 'Rational Choice Marxism', p. 35; 'Liberty, Equality, Community', p. 90.

<sup>26</sup> Wood, p. 86, my emphasis.

<sup>27</sup> Wood, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> This is the burden of her penultimate paragraph on p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> Ironically, the best argument I know linking rational-choice methodology with petty-bourgeois ideology was given by John Roemer: 'Neoclassicism, Marxism and Collective Action', *Journal of Economic Issues*, 12, 1978, pp. 147–61.

I have several reactions to this line of argument, but will confine myself to the printable ones.

(1) In the midst of a particularly witty and scathing paragraph, Wood says that "Imagine" and "suppose" are the basic vocabulary of this game-theoretic discourse.<sup>30</sup> So be it. (For the purposes of this point, anyway.) Let us imagine, therefore, what cannot possibly be true, that rational-choice theory is utterly misguided, and bears no relation whatsoever to social reality. I believe that the work produced on the left with the aid of the paradigm would nevertheless be quite justifiable on propagandist grounds alone. It would have disarmed the paradigm ideologically by showing that bourgeois theory can be used equally well to draw anti-bourgeois conclusions (I believe it can also be used in similar vein to draw anti-masculinist, anti-racist and anti-statist conclusions). There is of course a precedent for such a use of bourgeois theory, which should occur rather quickly to a Marxist. It is the precedent of Marx himself. What else did Marx do in *Capital* but subvert the classical political economy of his day by using it to draw anti-capitalist conclusions?

(2) But I don't believe that rational-choice theory bears no relation to social reality, and I don't believe Marx believed so either, for it can be shown that the model that lies at the heart of *Capital I* is a rational-choice model, as well as being a model inspired by classical value theory (possibly with classes as the collective actors, rather than individuals).<sup>31</sup>

(3) The obvious response to the previous point is to say: 'Yes, of course Marx thought that rational-choice applied within capitalism, even to subordinate classes; that is the whole point about saying that the rational actor is a bourgeois actor.' This obvious response lets Roemer off the hook, in so far as his theory applies to capitalism, which is the very connection in which it is mainly attacked by Wood.

(4) But I also think that Marx applied rational-choice logic to socialism in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. The socialist principle 'to each according to contribution' represents a necessary preliminary stage, because if the communist principle 'to each according to need' is implemented too soon, in the absence of selective incentives to contribute, no one will contribute, and the would-be-communist economy will collapse. The logic applies, it is true, when socialism is emerging from the womb of capitalist society. It might then be said, in an attempt to retrieve the historical relativity of the rational-choice paradigm, that socialist actors are rational-choice actors only as a consequence of their dismal recent past. When we get to communism,

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<sup>30</sup> Wood, p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> The model is explained in 'Value and Strategy', *Science and Society*, vol. XLVIII, no. 2, 1984, pp. 129-60. There is no tension in this case between a rational-choice market model and a value theory model, since Marx's *Capital I* capitalism has a single sector economy, in which price is necessarily proportional to labour value. Neither am I embarrassed by the possibility that *Capital I* classes are collective actors, because I argue in the book that collective action is not the intractable problem that rational-choice theorists have often cracked it up to be.

actors will have changed so dramatically that the logic of rational-choice no longer applies to them. Liberation is the process of sloughing off the husk of rational-choice, which is only part completed by the socialist phase.

I have two comments on this view. First, I think Marx's conception of higher phase communism is extremely Utopian (so when Wood accuses RCM of being Utopian, I find myself in good company). I am not convinced by, for example, Norman Geras's attempt to bring Marx on this topic a little down to Earth.<sup>32</sup> Communism is not only beyond rational-choice, it is beyond almost anything we could recognize as a structure of society. So the news that rational-choice will be transcended under communism does not cut very much ice with me. Second, even if one accepted that rational-choice considerations would lapse in some all-but-inconceivable communist future, it is not yet clear that the logic has lapsed because the communist actor has ceased to be a rational actor. For the social conditions have altered fairly dramatically as well: the forces of production have developed towards abundance, and work has been transformed into 'life's prime want'. A rational actor would therefore *want* to work in communism, which is why selective incentives to make the actor work are no longer required to exist, and we can leave the supply side to ability. I conclude that Marx deployed the rational-choice assumption in his analysis of capitalism and his projection of socialism. He may not even have abandoned it when he entertained his vision of communism.

(5) If Wood would thus find little joy for her argument in the present or the future, there is little either for her in the past. Recall that Brenner turns the feudal actor into a rational actor, so one cannot endorse Brenner's theory of feudalism as Wood does and simultaneously believe that rational actors are inherently capitalist.

(6) Nor do I think that the application of rational-choice theory on the left is confined to the traditional Marxian agenda of feudalism, capitalism, socialism and communism. At this point, it is well to bear in mind the distinctions between market action, economic action and rational action, where the three categories of action are listed in ascending order of generality. Rational action is, essentially, action that optimizes in the light of incentives and constraints. If the incentives are material (in the colloquial rather than the technical Marxian sense), then the action is *economically* rational. Material incentives include money, but also avoidance of burdensome toil, efficiency in the use of scarce resources, and so on. (The list is negotiable, and so therefore is the boundary of economic theory.) Market rationality can then be defined as that form of economic rationality which is specifically oriented towards monetary exchange.

It follows that the class of rational-choice theories is much broader than the class of theories of market exchange, or even of economic

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<sup>32</sup> Wood, p. 86; and the paragraph beginning 'We are bound, consequently, to conclude in favour of (c)', in Norman Geras, 'The Controversy about Marx and Justice', in Alex Callinicos, ed., *Marxist Theory*, Oxford 1989, p. 263.

theories considered *en masse*. This is why it makes sense to speak, for example, of a rational-choice theory of feudalism. In the book, I also consider rational-choice theories of non-market domains such as the household and the community, and investigate the rational-choice conditions for the formation of ethnic collective actors, and the genesis of the state form (that is, Hobbes's problem). I also discuss in an informal way the rational-choice dynamics of affiliation to, and boundary maintenance of, ethnic (or, indeed, gender) groups, given that the groups have already been formed. The latter question involves non-material incentives of status and prestige as well as material ones, so that the theories in question are significantly non-economic, even though they involve rational-choice modes of explanation.

If, as I hope to have shown in the book, rational-choice has something to offer in each of these areas, then the sort of argument used by Wood for the partial character of the paradigm becomes impossible to uphold. In working out this theoretical programme, I have nevertheless come to appreciate the value of other kinds of explanation—especially functional explanation—and to see what are the characteristic limitations of rational-choice theory in each of these fields of inquiry. The limitations include the points I freely acknowledge around the distinction between general and special theories; the consequences of the fact that rational-choice theory may be indeterminate in respect of multiple equilibria; the empirical fact I document that rational-choice logic apparently fails to overcome gender ideology; and the fact that human motivation is not exhausted by rational-choice motivation.

Wood's root-and-branch condemnation of the paradigm has forced me to confront the claims I gave out for it in 1986. Were they too extravagant? I cannot say they were. I never claimed that rational-choice had all the answers to everything, only that it had many of the answers to some of the more important things. I have mellowed somewhat in my attachment to the paradigm, but I still stand today by what I said before.

## The Limits of 'Political Marxism'

It was hard to read Ellen Wood's article 'Rational Choice Marxism: Is the Game Worth the Candle?' without mixed feelings.<sup>1</sup> The general thrust of her critique is undoubtedly correct: in the hands of Jon Elster, John Roemer, Adam Przeworski et al., the attempt to reinterpret historical materialism along methodological-individualist lines has deprived the theory of much of its specificity and substance. She is also right to set Rational Choice Marxism (RCM) alongside post-structuralism as the two main intellectual tendencies which, in the past decade or so, have provided the reaction against Marxism with a 'left' guise. Wood sought, however, not merely to demolish RCM, but to do so in part by demonstrating the existence of another, better version of historical materialism. And here the difficulties begin. For while I share most of her criticisms of RCM (indeed, I've made quite a few of them myself<sup>2</sup>), her own account of what is distinctive to, and worth defending in, Marxism seems to me seriously inadequate.

This account emerges most clearly where Wood discusses putative candidates for a RCM theory of history (pp. 59–75). She regards it as a tacit acknowledgement of the inadequacy of RCM theories of exploitation and class such as that constructed by Roemer that they should require supplementation by some separate account of the sources of historical change. Two such accounts are considered by Roemer in his book *Free to Lose*. One, G.A. Cohen's restatement of orthodox historical materialism, is indeed compatible with Roemer's static models; but the reason why this is so, namely that the development of the productive forces provides an 'exogenous cause' of social change, is indicative of the sense in which Cohen's is not a proper theory of history, since it invokes to explain social transformations, not the properties internal to the mode of production in question, but rather a 'trans-historical rationality' which leads human beings in conditions of scarcity to improve their methods of labour (pp. 69–71). Wood looks with much more favour on the other candidate, provided by the work of Robert Brenner, but argues both that his account of the transition

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<sup>1</sup> NLB 177, September–October 1989. All references in the text are to this article.

<sup>2</sup> See Alex Callinicos, 'Socialism, Justice, and Exploitation', *Morrell Studies in Toleration* 16, 1985; *Making History*, Cambridge 1987, especially ch. 2; and 'Introduction: Analytical Marxism', in Alex Callinicos, ed., *Marxist Theory*, Oxford 1989.



from feudalism to capitalism is inconsistent with the idea of any 'historical necessity for less productive "economic structures" to be followed by more productive ones', and that it involves a theory of history whose 'focus' is 'on the specificity of every mode of production, its endogenous logic of process, its own "laws of motion", its characteristic crises—to use Brenner's formula, its own rules of reproduction', in both respects sitting ill with RCM's tendency to rely on explanations derived from transhistorical features of human societies (pp. 68, 70).

This is by no means the first time that Wood has used Brenner's work to distinguish her alternative reading of historical materialism from Cohen's. Indeed, at one point she adopted for this reading the label given to Brenner's work by one of his Marxist critics, Guy Bois, namely 'political Marxism'. Bois elaborates: 'It amounts to a voluntarist vision of history in which the class struggle is divorced from all objective contingencies, and, in the first place, from such laws of development as may be peculiar to a specific mode of production.'<sup>3</sup> Wood rejects the charge of voluntarism, but takes Marx himself to say that 'capitalism is unique in its drive to revolutionize the productive forces, while other modes of production have tended to conserve existing forces' (p. 70 n. 47). The 'explanatory force' of the development of the productive forces is subject to 'severe limits'; to understand social change we must look instead 'in the direction of class struggle as the operative principle of historical movement'.<sup>4</sup> Thus the main sense in which historical explanation draws on features intrinsic to particular social systems seems to be that it identifies the specific form of surplus-extraction, thereby providing the context of the class struggles which provide the motor of change; as, for example, Brenner does when he argues that the breakthrough to agrarian capitalism in England depended on the specific outcome there of the Europe-wide struggles between lord and peasant at the end of the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup>

### The Rise of Agrarian Capitalism

This is a version of Marxism that it is hard not to have great reservations about. In part, these reservations stem from difficulties specific to Brenner's account of the rise of agrarian capitalism. His writing has undoubtedly provided a valuable corrective to those accounts of the transition to capitalism which, from Pirenne and Sweezy to Braudel and Wallerstein, have accorded prime importance to the expansion of the world market.<sup>6</sup> Brenner is, moreover, right to stress the crucial role played by the emergence in England of a distinctively

<sup>3</sup> Guy Bois, 'Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy', reprinted in T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate*, Cambridge 1983, p. 113. See Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'The Separation of the Economic and Political under Capitalism', *NLR* 127, May–June 1981, pp. 75–8.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, 'Marxism and the Course of History', *NLR* 147, September–October 1984, pp. 101, 105.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe', reprinted in Aston and Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate*.

<sup>6</sup> See especially Robert Brenner, 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: a Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', *NLR* 104, July–August 1977.

capitalist agriculture, especially in making possible that country's establishment of first military and then industrial primacy over its rivals—particularly France—after 1689.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Brenner's exclusive focus on agrarian capitalism has encouraged, perhaps contrary to his own intentions, some wildly one-sided readings of the process of capitalist development. Probably the most lamentable example is George Comninel's *Rethinking the French Revolution* (based, incidentally, on a dissertation supervised by Wood), which argues that, since there was no equivalent in pre-revolutionary rural France of the capital-wage-labour relations increasingly prevalent in the contemporary English countryside, 'there simply were no capitalist relations—no appropriation of *surplus-values*, as opposed to commercial profit-taking—that can be attributed to the [French] bourgeoisie'.<sup>8</sup> What such arguments leave out of account is the extent to which early modern merchant capitalism, though still rooted in feudal social relations, provided a framework for the emergence of what Lenin called 'transitional forms' through which capital began to acquire control over production.<sup>9</sup> One such form was what Robin Blackburn calls the 'systemic slavery' of the British and French West Indies, and later Cuba, Brazil and the American South: the large-scale exploitation of slave labour, producing for the world market either mass-consumption goods (sugar) or industrial inputs (cotton).<sup>10</sup> 'Proto-industrialization'—the spread of rural industry, usually producing textiles, often on the basis of the putting-out system—represented another form in which labour was partially subsumed under capital, and arguably a more decisive one, since the abolition of slavery led often to a fragmentation of productive units, while the limitations of the putting-out system tended to drive capitalists to centralize the labour process in the factory.<sup>11</sup> The development of agrarian capitalism, on which Brenner and his followers concentrate, was part of a much broader process through which bourgeois social relations progressively undermined the old feudal order.

But it is not simply doubts about the historical claims advanced by Brenner (or, perhaps better, by those influenced by him) which give one pause when confronted with Wood's employment of his work to construct 'political Marxism'. Historical materialism explains social transformations as the outcome of two mechanisms: first, the structural contradictions that arise between the development of the productive forces and the prevailing production relations; and secondly,

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', in Aston and Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate*; and 'Bourgeois Revolution and the Transition to Capitalism', in A.L. Beier, ed., *The First Modern Society*, Cambridge, 1989. I discuss Brenner's account of capitalist development in *Making History*, pp. 157–72.

<sup>8</sup> George Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution*, London 1987, p. 180. See the excellent critique by David McNally, 'A Bourgeois Revolution?', *Socialist Worker* (Toronto), August 1989.

<sup>9</sup> See V.I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, Moscow 1967, ch. III. Chris Harman offers a powerful critique of Brenner's conception of the transition, in 'From Feudalism to Capitalism', *International Socialism* 2: 45, 1990.

<sup>10</sup> Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848*, Verso, London 1988.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, P. Kriedte, *Peasants, Landlords and Merchant Capitalists*, Leamington Spa 1983.

and only in the context of the socio-economic crises generated by these contradictions, the class struggle. *Capital* does not only elucidate the conditions and forms of the extraction of surplus-value within the production process; it also locates capitalism's chronic liability to recurrent economic crises in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall—the form of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production specific to that mode of production. Some of the greatest recent triumphs of Marxist historiography have been to delineate more precisely the nature of this contradiction in pre-capitalist modes. As Perry Anderson points out, G.E.M. de Ste Croix's explanation of the decline of classical antiquity is an instance of the kind of 'systemic contradiction' that occurs 'when the *forces and relations of production* enter into decisive contradiction with each other'.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, there is little doubt that, despite their disagreements, Brenner and Bois have greatly advanced our understanding of the form taken by the similar contradiction responsible for the late-medieval crisis of feudalism.<sup>13</sup>

### A Sociology of Domination

The trouble is that Wood is plainly hostile to giving any explanatory weight to structural contradictions between the forces and relations of production. 'The proposition that history is propelled forward by the inevitable contradictions between forces and relations of production, contradictions that emerge as developing productive forces come against the "fetters" imposed by production relations' is, she says, 'vacuous'.<sup>14</sup> Wood also suggests that Marx's attachment to this proposition represented 'an undeveloped phase of Marx's work, still uncritically bound to classical bourgeois thought' (p. 69), a claim developed at great length by Comninel, who argues, implausibly, that the development of the productive forces is a central theme only of *The German Ideology*, which must therefore be consigned to the flames as a piece of 'liberal materialist ideology', and plays no part in *Capital*.<sup>15</sup> But, once structural contradictions between the forces and relations of production have been excised from historical materialism, it is not clear that what is left amounts to a theory of social transformation in any real sense. Class struggle alone cannot account for the transition from one mode of production to another. Open or concealed conflict between exploiter and exploited is an endemic feature of class societies. But it assumes a greater intensity in periods of what Gramsci called 'organic crisis', where the very viability of the prevailing

<sup>12</sup> Perry Anderson, 'Class Struggle in the Ancient World', *History Workshop* 16, Autumn 1983, p. 68. Compare G.E.M. de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, London 1981, pp. 226–39.

<sup>13</sup> See, in addition to the articles by Brenner cited above, Bois's magnificent *Crise du féodalisme*, Paris 1976.

<sup>14</sup> Wood, 'Marxism and the Course of History', p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution*, p. 133. Brenner offers a much more serious version of this argument in 'The Social Basis of Economic Development', in John Roemer, ed., *Analytical Marxism*, Cambridge 1986, pp. 40–48; but to address the issues he raises would require far greater space than I have here. See my discussion of Comninel on Marx in 'Bourgeois Revolutions and Historical Materialism', *International Socialism* 2: 43, 1989, pp. 161–3.

social system is placed in question.<sup>16</sup> Marxism can only provide the theory of history it purports to offer if it can explain the emergence of such crises. To do so in terms of the class struggle itself, as some contemporary versions of Marxist economic theory (for example, the 'capital logic' school and regulation theory) tend, is not merely to commit a vicious circularity, in which intensifying class struggle explains intensifying class struggle; it is also to reduce historical materialism to a voluntarist social theory, where the motor of change is the clash of hostile class wills. Andrew Levine argues that versions of Marxism 'that do not theorize transitions, that fail to postulate a direction of change between epochal structures', represent 'not a materialist theory of history' but 'a materialist sociology'.<sup>17</sup> Wood's 'political Marxism' is little more than a sociology of domination. It is good that, unlike other such sociologies, chiefly of Weberian provenance, Wood's attaches primacy to class exploitation, but it is very far from being enough.

The conflict between the forces and relations of production can only serve as a mechanism of social change if the productive forces tend to develop and thereby become incompatible with existing relations. It is one of the great merits of Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History* to have so forcefully redirected attention to this simple fact. Wood, when seeking to evade its implications, resorts to Brenner's argument that the 'rules of reproduction' in pre-capitalist societies, in particular the fact that both producers and exploiters have direct, non-market access to the means of subsistence, rules out the intensive development of the productive forces, which becomes possible only when economic agents' dependence on commodity production forces them to compete and therefore to innovate.<sup>18</sup> But even if we readily grant that capitalism is incomparably more dynamic a mode of production than its predecessors, how far are we to take Brenner's argument? He surely isn't saying that there was *no* development of the productive forces under feudalism (the main pre-capitalist mode with which he concerns himself). Apart from being plainly false, such a claim conjures up a vista of endless stagnation unlikely to issue in any new social form. Brenner's argument is better taken as setting *limits* to the development of the productive forces in pre-capitalist societies, and therefore requires supplementation with an account of how such societies nevertheless permit a degree of technological progress. The most obvious candidate for such an account, Cohen's Primacy Thesis, unfortunately won't do, for well-known reasons—its postulation of a general human interest in the development of the productive forces, its reliance on functional explanations, and its requirement that social revolutions are inevitable.<sup>19</sup> But one can imagine some elements of a less vulnerable account. One is what Erik Olin Wright calls the 'weak impulse' for the productive forces to develop arising from, *inter alia*, the fact that 'under conditions in which increases in labour productivity

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London 1971, p. 178.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Levine, *The End of the State*, London 1987, p. 104.

<sup>18</sup> Brenner, 'Social Basis', *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> The *locus classicus* of these criticisms is Andrew Levine and Erik Olin Wright, 'Rationality and Class Struggle', *NLR* 123, September–October 1980.

have the consequence of reducing the toil of the direct producers, direct producers will in general have interests in developing the forces of production.<sup>20</sup> Another is an analysis of the mechanisms which permit specific pre-capitalist modes of production to achieve productive progress over their predecessors. One weakness of Brenner's discussion of pre-capitalist societies is his failure to differentiate between them, so that slave and feudal modes of production are treated as representing the same level of development, which, once again, ill accords with the historical record.<sup>21</sup>

Whatever the merits of these suggestions, they do point to the central flaw common both to Wood and—in as much as she draws on his historiography—to Brenner, namely a unilateral concentration on class exploitation and struggle in the explanation of social transformation. One can speculate about the reasons for this—some good (a rejection of the technological determinism of Second International Marxism), others less so (Wood eschews any discussion of RCM's critique of the labour theory of value—an unnecessary concession which, once made, makes it difficult to accord proper importance to the theory of crises that provides the objective context of Marx's strategy of socialist revolution). But whatever the reasons, the voluntarism of Wood's 'political Marxism' is disabling, undermining any claim it might have to constitute an adequate alternative to RCM's collapse into social democracy.

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<sup>20</sup> Erik Olin Wright, 'Giddens's Critique of Marx', *NLR* 138, March–April 1983, p. 28. Wood does at one point endorse this argument: see 'Marxism and the Course of History', pp. 101–102, n. 16. But she doesn't seem to realize that the 'weak impulse' for the forces to develop creates what Wright calls 'a dynamic asymmetry' between the forces and relations, such that 'eventually the forces will reach a point at which they are "fettered", that is, a point at which further development is impossible in the absence of transformation in the relations of production.' 'Giddens's Critique of Marx', p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Brenner, 'Social Basis', pp. 32–3, n. 6.

## Explaining Everything or Nothing?

Alan Carling accuses me of 'everythingism'—that is, of believing that 'you need a complete explanation of something before you can have any explanation of something.' Do I really? I thought I was stating a rather more modest requirement, namely that a 'paradigm' like RCM, which claims to improve on, indeed to replace, 'classical' Marxism, ought to add more than it subtracts from existing explanations. It was, after all, not I who made extravagant claims for RCM, that 'it is now only within the rational-choice context that some of the leading questions on the classical agenda of Marxist theory—historical explanation and the delineation of social form, the collective dynamics of class struggle, the evolution and evaluation of capitalism—can be fruitfully discussed.'<sup>1</sup> If Carling now wants drastically to modify those claims, by effectively conceding my principal argument that all the important theoretical and empirical work needs to be done in advance of applying the RCM model, then that's fine with me.

I do not think, however, that Carling realizes the extent of the concessions he has made. He writes that he is 'happy to second' my criticism that rational-choice explanation 'does not,' as he puts it, 'explain what it treats as a presupposition of its explanations.' He continues: 'and since the presuppositions often include (1) the preferences of the actor and (2) the social context in which the actor acts, rational-choice explanation often does not explain either the preferences or the social context of the actor.' Surely this is a huge concession which leaves very little of RCM's pretensions intact.

Rational Choice Marxism, if it is to make good its claims as something more than a very modest and limited parenthesis in the large corpus of Marxist theory, must be distinguished by more than the simple assumption that people (often) act reasonably. This much is assumed by classical Marxism—as is clear from Marx's own analysis of capitalism, for example. But the core of any social explanation that centres on rational agency must then consist of specifying and explaining the social structures which set the terms of what is reasonable and preferable in any given context, and illuminating the different criteria of reasonableness or eligibility established by different systems of

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Carling, 'Rational Choice Marxism', *NLR* 160, November–December 1986, p. 55.

social relations. Carling now acknowledges that RCM is not much use in that respect, since it simply assumes the structures that need to be explained. (I also argued that RCM actually detracts from Marxism's ability to construct such explanations.) He concedes that the hard work must be done in advance by some other means, but it is not clear to me what he thinks RCM adds to these prior theoretical and empirical accounts of structures and preferences—apart from their translation into formal models which themselves play no role in the construction of the explanation, and probably mystify more than they clarify. It is not clear, in other words, what he thinks is left for the rational-choice model to explain, once it assumes a given set of structures and preferences.

Carling might claim that RCM has the advantage of giving higher priority to the individual, but is that really true? RCM's characteristic procedure is to impute preferences and structures, in the form of 'resources' or 'assets', to abstract individuals, in effect deducing their motivations from the structures or 'macroprocesses' themselves. The individual thus becomes, as I argued before, little more than an embodied structure. In fact, RCM explanations are even further abstracted from individual rationality and agency by the tendency, especially visible in Roemer (in contrast to 'classical' Marxism) to impose a transhistorical 'rationality', derived from capitalism, on all actors irrespective of their specific historical contexts. Even at lower levels of abstraction, in the study of particular empirical phenomena, rational-choice explanations typically derive whatever explanatory power they have not from the application of the rational-choice model but from a specification of the context in which the relevant choices are made.

#### If Every Textbook Contained Roemer's Proof...

One major question I set out to answer in my text was whether, even if we grant Roemer his moral argument against capitalism, the price he exacts for it is worth paying. What effect, I ask, does it have on Marxist theory as a whole? Carling simply misreads the question. 'Are you kidding?' he asks indignantly. Would it not make a big difference if every neoclassical economic textbook contained a proof of capitalism's exploitative character? Evidently he takes my question to be a rhetorical one, meaning that I am denying the huge effects of Roemer's moral argument—when, of course, my contention is quite the opposite: that Roemer's argument does indeed, and profoundly, affect his whole project of reconstructing Marxism, by undermining its explanatory power.

But since Carling has asked me a question, let me briefly try to answer it. Economists, it is true, tend to lag behind the rest of the world in acknowledging social realities, preferring to deal with abstract and formalistic models which have little to do with the substance of social life. In that sense, it would, of course, be very nice if economics textbooks contained a Roemerian proof. But would it make as much difference as Carling thinks? Conventional sociology, for example, has long been ready to acknowledge that inequality breeds inequality. Max Weber, after all, knew all about the consequences of unequal

'market chances', and standard sociology textbooks dealing with 'stratification' freely acknowledge these Weberian insights. Does Roemer really go beyond this?

There are now many even on the left (see Göran Therborn's article in *Marxism Today* some time ago<sup>2</sup>) who question the relevance of 'exploitation' as an organizing category in the analysis of advanced capitalist societies. They are hardly likely to be convinced by formalistic mathematical proofs. Indeed, they would probably dismiss the relevance of the concept precisely on the grounds that in prosperous Western capitalism exploitation has little meaning *except* as an abstract mathematical formula. This is, to be sure, an inexcusably sanguine view of capitalist prosperity, given the current, and growing, extent of poverty, homelessness and despair in advanced capitalist societies (not to mention the wastefulness and destructiveness of capitalism even at its best); but the proponents of this view are unlikely to be shaken by yet more mathematics—and apologists for capitalism even less so. If theories of exploitation are to be convincing, they need to be capable of *explaining* something—for example, the systemic logic and crises of capitalism which produce not only poverty and degradation but also waste, destruction, despoliation of the environment, the debasement of culture, and other consequences that deeply affect the lives even of those who are not materially disadvantaged by the system. Whatever Roemer's model may tell us about exploitation as a moral problem, it detaches the theory of exploitation from any explanation of capitalism as a specific social system of production and accumulation; indeed it discards the very features of Marxist theory that allow it to deal with exploitation as a social relation and the driving mechanism of the capitalist system.

But if my principal theme was the explanatory weakness of RCM, it also needs to be added that the moral force of Roemer's theory is itself pretty weak. A theoretical paradigm that asks us to view the transition from feudalism to capitalism as a benign interlude, during which serfs were offered a choice between the blandishments of feudal lords and the seductions of capitalists holding out the benefits of a proletarian condition, is hardly equipped to expose the harsher realities of capitalism. How much would Roemer's moral indictment of capitalism mean to, say, Eastern European advocates of the 'market economy'?

### Begging the Questions of History—Again

It is Carling's privilege to claim that he understands Robert Brenner better than I do, but does he really want to claim a better understanding than Brenner has of himself? At any rate, until Carling spells out his argument as he promises to do in his forthcoming book, I am obliged to suppose that, in order to pin the RCM label on Brenner who has explicitly refused it, Carling will have to define RCM with even less specificity than he has so far, even repudiating the methodological individualism which Roemer and others have regarded as an essential feature. Who knows? If RCM is defined loosely enough—for example,

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<sup>2</sup> Göran Therborn, 'Vorsprung durch Rethink', *Marxism Today*, February 1989, p. 28.



if it simply requires accepting that some regular social patterns are produced by people behaving reasonably in any given context—even I might qualify.

On the more substantive issue of Brenner's theory of history and Carling's attempt to reconcile Brenner with G.A. Cohen: Carling confirms in spades my conviction that RCM cannot explain history without assuming the very thing that needs to be explained. As I understand it, his argument proceeds as follows: (1) Brenner depicts feudalism as fundamentally static; (2) he therefore needs capitalism to get development going; (3) he therefore needs Cohen's functional explanation, which, applied to Brenner's account of English development, would suggest that the specific conditions that compelled England to 'get development going' *had* to occur; or more specifically, that if this particular England had not existed, there would have been another one ('There will always be an England', Carling wittily observes).

The leaps in this argument are truly prodigious. First, Brenner does not say that feudalism had no dynamic of its own, only that it had no systemic impulse to increase productivity by technical innovation (which is not, by the way, the same as saying that no technological innovations occurred). Indeed, his whole argument concerning the transition is predicated on the specific dynamic, the laws of motion, set in train by feudal property relations. Second, the proposition that 'feudalism fetters the development of the forces of production; capitalism fosters their development' does not mean that the development of productive forces is the motor of history, nor does it mean that capitalism *had* to occur, or that there *had* to be an England. It is completely unwarranted to jump from the unexceptionable proposition that capitalism uniquely fosters technological development to the contention that capitalism developed *because* it fosters technological development, or the even stronger claim that capitalism *had* to develop because history somehow requires the development of productive forces, or because less productive systems are necessarily followed by more productive ones. (If fostering the development of productive forces is the only principle of historical motion that Carling recognizes, and if the failure to foster such development means, by definition, stagnation, how would he explain historical transformations which did not take the form of advancing technical development—say, the decline of imperial Rome? But more on this later, in reply to Alex Callinicos.)

In short, Brenner has no need of Cohen. We need Cohen only if we *start* with Cohen, that is, only if we begin, as Carling does, with the assumption that the development of productive forces is the only available principle of historical movement from one mode of production to another, only if we assume the very thing that needs to be demonstrated. I cannot deny with absolute certainty that if there had not been one England there would have been another. Maybe there would have been. But we cannot simply *assume* it, and we certainly cannot allow the *assumption* to serve as a substitute for historical explanation. For that matter, we can do very nicely without the assumption that 'there will always be an England'. There is, and

could be, no evidence to support such a completely non-falsifiable proposition; and why do we need it anyway? Why is it not enough to say that there *was* an England? It is certainly reasonable to argue that, once capitalism had established itself, its spread was inevitable, because of its specific drive and capacity for self-expansion. But this says *nothing* about the necessity of its emergence, or even about the mechanisms by which it occurred.

Brenner seeks the moving force for the transition from feudalism within the dynamic of feudalism itself, not by reading capitalist principles and motivations back into history, nor by assuming some trans-historical 'general theory' of motion. Carling—not surprisingly, given the static quality of RCM's 'non-relational' theory of exploitation—apparently cannot accept that the contradictions within a specific structure of social relations, with its own specific forms of activity, can set in motion a transformation into another social form. This is why he cannot accept that Brenner's 'special' theory of feudalism can explain the transition without extraneous and circular assumptions derived from the 'general' theory of technological determinism. Here we have the perfect illustration of my central argument about RCM's approach to history, about its irreducible need to assume the very thing that has to be explained.

### On Markets and Other Matters

On politics: I am aware—and stated clearly—that there is a range of political views among RCMists. I am also aware that Roemer dislikes capitalism and has strongly criticized it. It is, I think, the greatest virtue of his work that he regards the critique of capitalism as a primary task of socialist theory, at a time when so many on the left have abandoned that project. But my argument was that the weakness of the RCM paradigm as a basis for criticizing capitalism is most strikingly illustrated by the fact that the one major exponent of the paradigm who has most systematically attacked capitalism has erected such a weak barrier against right-wing triumphalism, because his hands are tied by the narrowly formalistic requirements of the model and its subjection to the conceptual demands of neoclassical economics.

Carling takes exception to my statement that he himself effectively presents socialism as if it were 'simply a quantitative improvement, an extension of capitalist freedom and equality'. I shall accept his insistence that he did not intend to lump equality together with freedom as a good partially provided by capitalism, though he repeatedly pairs them in precisely this way<sup>3</sup> (and though he could legitimately argue that capitalism *does* advance equality in much the same ways and degrees that it advances freedom, by discarding 'extra-economic' and 'prescriptive' determinants). At any rate, my argument had to do specifically with his treatment of the market as a sphere of freedom, and on this score he made it very clear that socialism should be conceived as offering a wider distribution of this capitalist good. I objected to his formulation not because it acknowledges some kind of (limited)

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Carling, 'Rational Choice Marxism', p. 33

truth in capitalism's claim to freedom and equality, nor even because it maintains that the capitalist market offers certain choices. My objection is rather that his account of the market is uncritical and one-sided, that the market appears there above all—indeed *only*—as a sphere of freedom and not also a compulsion, a system of coercion. Even if we leave aside the typical function of the capitalist market as an instrument of power for large multinational capital, what about its imperatives of competition, profitability, and the commodification of all social values and relationships? Are these not compulsions which determine the disposition of people and resources in ways antithetical to freedom, democracy and self-determination as conceived by the socialist project? There is nothing ambiguous about Carling's assertion that, while the workplace and the state are spheres of coercion, 'the marketplace really is a free space'<sup>4</sup> This is an extraordinary proposition coming from someone who claims a better insight into the operations of capitalism than is possessed by 'classical' Marxism. And if our account of capitalist coercion is inadequate, on what basis will we construct our conception of socialist emancipation? Now, more than ever, we need to be clear about this, when advocates of marketization, East and West, identify freedom and democracy with the capitalist market, and are studiously evasive about its compulsions or about how they propose to separate out its freedoms and choices from its restrictions and coercions (when they are not openly embracing the market *because* of its coercions).

Finally, a very short comment on the 'rational actor'. Here Carling just invents an argument for me and then proceeds to knock down his own straw man. I have no difficulty regarding, say, feudal lords or peasants as 'rational actors'. Nor do I, as Carling suggests, criticize RCM on the specious grounds that the idea of a 'rational actor' is somehow reactionary. I do object to RCM's tendency to universalize a particular form of rationality specific to capitalism, but I also maintain that the RCM claim to give centre stage to the 'rational actor' is largely spurious. The 'rational individual', with all his/her assets, turns out to be an embodied structure, and even (especially in Roemer's account of history) the carrier of universal historical laws, the transhistorical logic of technological determinism.

What all this amounts to is that Alan Carling has failed to answer any one of my principal criticisms of Rational Choice Marxism: about its explanatory weakness (which he apparently concedes), about its question-begging and circular conception of history (which he simply reproduces), and about the explanatory price we are asked to pay for the meagre benefits of a moral argument too weak to withstand the onslaughts of capitalist triumphalism (which he just ignores). It is, again, to Roemer's credit that, against the prevailing tide, he still

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 36. Carling refers, more or less dismissively, to the view that 'what passes for freedom under capitalism is a covert form of oppression' ('Rational Choice Marxism', p. 33); but, curiously, he has in mind only the manipulation of consumer demand, and takes no account of the more fundamental ways in which the capitalist market determines human lives and relationships, through the disposition of labour and resources, the imperatives of competition not only among capitalists but also among workers, and the commodification of all social life.

regards the critique of capitalism as a major intellectual project for the left. But we need something a good deal more powerful than RCM as a basis for criticizing capitalism—especially now, when apologists for capitalism are not only declaring its final victory (as if it were no longer producing massive poverty, destruction of the environment, violent crime and cultural degradation) but even announcing the end of history altogether. Now, more than ever, we need something which does indeed creatively improve on 'classical' Marxism. Nothing Carling has said persuades me that RCM is it—or, for that matter, that we gain from it more than we lose.

### A Few Observations in Response to Alex Callinicos: Forces and Relations of Production

In challenging Carling's account of history, I asked what he would make of historical changes that did not take the form of advancing the forces of production, for example, the collapse of classical antiquity. A similar question might be put to Alex Callinicos, the more so as he cites the decline of Rome as a prime example against my version of historical materialism. I do not intend to debate ancient history with him, but the example is instructive and provides a useful point of entry into his interpretation of historical materialism.

Callinicos seems to have little sympathy for crude technological determinism (though it is not always clear how his own position differs from it). Instead, he castigates me for paying insufficient attention to the principle of *contradiction*, specifically the contradiction between forces and relations of production as the chief mechanism of major social transformations. The Roman case is meant to illustrate how such systemic contradictions (as distinct from some 'voluntaristic' agency like class struggle) produce historical change.

What, then, does the contradiction between forces and relations mean? It is not entirely clear what Callinicos *wants* it to mean, since his statement of the principle does not coincide with the historical examples he invokes to illustrate it. The explicitly stated principle, at any rate, has to do with dynamic impulses created by the development of productive forces: forces of production tend to develop, he argues; at some point, they come up against the limits imposed by production relations which make further development impossible; this contradiction compels productive forces to break through the restrictive integument, requiring relations of production to change and allowing forces to advance.

But what actually happens in the Roman case, as Callinicos himself understands it (via Geoffrey de Ste Croix as summarized by Perry Anderson)? Here is the systemic contradiction described by Anderson, interpreting Ste Croix: 'a decline in the supply of slave labour consequent on low rates of internal reproduction, leading to offsetting attempts at slave-breeding, decreasing the rate of exploitation, which then necessitated complementary depression of free labour to sustain

overall levels of surplus extraction.<sup>5</sup> Whether or not this is an adequate explanation of the transition from antiquity to feudalism, what does it tell us about the meaning of the contradiction that Callinicos has in mind? Here we have a case where the primary appropriating class reached the limits of surplus extraction and sought to compensate for a declining rate of exploitation by depressing the condition of peasant producers in order to widen the range of its appropriative powers. This was not a case where dynamic forces taxed the limits of restrictive relations. If productive forces were 'fettered', it is not in the sense that their inherent tendency to develop was thwarted, but rather that such a tendency was largely absent, or very weak, in the prevailing production relations, which encouraged the extension of extra-economic surplus extraction instead of the improvement of labour productivity. Nor can it be said that production relations were compelled to assume a new form more conducive to the development of productive forces. On the contrary, it was more a matter of relations of production adapting to the limits of productive forces, a reorganization of surplus extraction to accommodate the limitations of production. As the imperial infrastructure—its cities, its road systems, its wealth, its population—disintegrated, and as the empire became increasingly vulnerable to 'barbarian' invasions (by peoples with less developed productive forces), the apparatus of surplus appropriation was effectively scaled down to the level of existing productive forces.

Although evidence is sparse, it can even be argued (as Marx and Engels, incidentally, did argue, for example in *The German Ideology*), that the result was a *destruction* of productive forces, a regression from the development of Roman antiquity. At any rate, long after the 'crisis', indeed after the better part of a millennium, the level of material life remained very low; and economic growth, when it did occur, for a long time was based not so much on the improvement of productivity as on the 'extra-economic' logic of a war economy, the logic of coercive appropriation and pillage.<sup>6</sup> Feudalism did eventually bring about technical developments (though their extent remains a subject of controversy); but by this time, surely, the causal thread between the crisis of antiquity and the development of productive forces has worn rather thin. The connections would be exceedingly tenuous even if Callinicos were to reverse the order of causality, from his claim that developing productive forces strain the fetters of restrictive production relations, to an argument that production relations change to encourage the advancement of stagnant productive forces. If we are prepared to accept this kind of timescale, we can probably claim a direct causal link between almost any two widely separated historical episodes, without regard to the duration and complexity of intervening processes; but how informative would such a causal explanation be? And it still remains a question whether the availability (which by no means guaranteed the widespread *utilization*<sup>7</sup>) of technical

<sup>5</sup> Perry Anderson, 'Class Struggle in the Ancient World', *History Workshop Journal* 16, Autumn 1983, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Georges Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy*, Ithaca 1974, p. 269.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Brenner, *The Brenner Debate*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 32, 233.

innovations when they did occur determined social change—the more so as differences in the rate and direction of social transformations between, say, England (where agrarian capitalism eventually emerged) and France (where agrarian stagnation eventually set in) simply did not correspond to differences in their respective feudal technologies.

### Contradictions and Rules for Reproduction

We can certainly call the Roman pattern an example of the contradiction between forces and relations of production; but if we do, we must mean something different from even the weakest formulation to which Callinicos subscribes, quoting Erik Olin Wright, namely that 'the "weak impulse" for the forces to develop creates what Wright calls "a dynamic asymmetry" between the forces and relations such that "eventually the forces will reach a point at which they are 'fettered', that is, a point at which further development is impossible in the absence of transformation in the relations of production.'" (n. 20) Although Wright hedges this proposition about with many disclaimers about the 'weakness' of the impulse, in Callinicos's interpretation it clearly implies that historical movement is generated by the developmental impulse of productive forces. He maintains that 'The conflict between the forces and relations of production can only serve as a mechanism of social change if the productive forces tend to develop and thereby become incompatible with existing relations.' This means, unambiguously, that it is the advance of productive forces which impels history forward. Yet Callinicos cites as a prime example the case of Rome, where the 'contradiction' served as a mechanism of change not because forces were developing beyond the capacity of existing relations, nor even by bringing about an enabling transformation of social relations which had the effect of shifting stagnant forces of production, but, on the contrary, by compelling relations to sink to the level of productive forces. To accommodate this example, then, we would have to include among the possible outcomes of the contradiction the adaptation of production relations to the 'fettters' of productive forces, and perhaps even the destruction of those forces.

These difficulties cannot be overcome simply by adopting some version of Cohen's 'functional' explanation, which allows a temporal priority to changes in production relations as long as we assume that the underlying reason for such changes is the need to advance the forces of production. This kind of 'explanation' works as a general account of history only if, as I have argued on other occasions, we are prepared to interpret it with such vacuous generality as to include every possibility from the revolutionary improvement of productive forces to their stagnation, even regression. This is not, of course, to deny that technical innovations occurred in pre-capitalist societies, or even that there were incremental and cumulative developments. The question is whether these developments constituted the dynamic force that motivated historical change—either (causally) before or

('functionally') after the fact.<sup>8</sup> This is not an issue that can be resolved by invoking *a priori*, universalistic and question-begging assumptions about the progressive directionality of history.

It would be better not to talk about the forces of production as if they represented an autonomous principle of historical movement, somehow external to any given system of social relations. Even if over the long term there is a cumulative directionality in the progress of human knowledge and technology, the cumulative continuities of history do not alter the fact that each distinct mode of production has its own specific connections between forces and relations of production, its own specific contradictions—or perhaps we should say, to use Brenner's formulation, its own specific 'rules for reproduction'. Let us take the Roman case (as described by Callinicos). What is at stake here is a crisis of appropriation. What makes it a crisis is not that sluggish production relations restrict the further development of (more or less) dynamic productive forces. It is rather that, within the limits of existing conditions, within the prevailing ensemble of productive forces and relations, the principal classes can no longer successfully pursue their normal strategies of self-reproduction. (Class struggle enters into the process *here*, and not simply at the point of transition, since strategies of reproduction are determined not in isolation but in relations between appropriators and producers.) When they reach their viable limits, the strategies are likely to change. This does not, however, necessarily imply the adoption of strategies more conducive to the advancement of productive forces. In pre-capitalist societies generally, the outcome is more likely to be an adjustment in the scope and methods of surplus extraction, or a reorganization of the extra-economic forces which constitute the power of appropriation, whether by direct exploitation or by pillage and war: the state, the military apparatus, and so on. (This also means, incidentally, that the advantage which any particular society may have in relation to others need not be directly proportional to the level of its productive forces.<sup>9</sup> We cannot generalize throughout history the rules of international capitalist competition which give the competitive advantage to more productive economies—though even here, geopolitical or military superiority may not neatly coincide with productivity. In pre-capitalist societies, the effective organization of 'extra-economic' resources is likely to be decisive.) The available productive capacities certainly establish the limits of the possible, but to say this

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<sup>8</sup> Callinicos seems not to understand the difference between propositions having to do with the occurrence of technical innovations and those concerning the dynamics of historical change. For example, he accuses Brenner of acknowledging no differences in levels of development among various pre-capitalist societies, but he cites a passage which says nothing of the kind. Brenner's argument is not that all pre-capitalist societies are on the same level of technological development, but rather that their various property relations have in common a tendency to encourage the expansion of extra-economic surplus extraction rather than the improvement of labour productivity. This is why (see, for example, the passages cited in note 7 on p. 112 above) any failures to improve agricultural productivity in such cases may have less to do with the unavailability of new techniques than with the under-utilization even of existing technologies.

<sup>9</sup> This point relates to the argument put forward by Christopher Bertram in 'International Competition in Historical Materialism', *NLR* 183, September–October 1990, pp. 116–128.

is not to say either that less productive systems must necessarily be followed by more productive ones, or even that the developmental impulses of productive forces determine the necessity and direction of historical change.

### The Specificity of Capitalism

This is precisely the reason for insisting on the specificity of capitalism, as distinct from other modes of production, and especially the specificity of its relationship between forces and relations of production. The transition to capitalism is historically unique because it represents the first case in which a crisis in strategies of reproduction produced not simply a transformation in modes of appropriation but a process the result of which was a wholly new and continuous drive to revolutionize the forces of production. It is specifically in capitalism that the dynamic impulse of productive forces can be regarded as a primary mechanism of social change. Capitalism is also unique in its particular systemic contradictions between forces and relations of production: its unprecedented drive to develop and socialize the forces of production—not least in the form of the working class—constantly comes up against the limits of its primary purpose, the self-expansion of capital, which is sometimes impelled even to destroy productive capacities (as Thatcher's Britain has reason to know). Socialism can no doubt be understood as building upon the developments of capitalism, while resolving its specific contradictions; but to acknowledge the specificity of capitalism is at the same time to insist on the specificity of socialism, not simply as an extension of, or an improvement upon, capitalism but as a system of social relations with an inherent logic of its own—a system not driven by the imperatives of accumulation and so-called 'growth', with their attendant waste, destruction and ecological devastation; a system whose values and creative impulses are not circumscribed by constricted notions of technological progress.

Callinicos thinks my version of historical materialism is too 'voluntaristic', too insensitive to objective determinations and structural contradictions. But we can recognize the particular structural contradictions of pre-capitalist societies, or capitalism's own specific laws of motion and propensity to crisis, without reading the crises and contradictions of capitalism back into all history.<sup>20</sup> The issue of 'voluntarism', which Callinicos regularly throws in my face (in what has become a more or less annual fixture), is a red herring, because the dispute between us is not about *whether* class struggle occurs within a framework of 'objective' determinations and structural contradictions, but rather about the particular nature of those determinations and contradictions themselves. If Callinicos is worried that my version of historical materialism tends toward a 'collapse into social democracy', he

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<sup>20</sup> Incidentally, I did not, as Callinicos suggests, concede to Rational Choice Marxism its critique of the labour theory of value. On the contrary, I argued that, if we concede to Roemer his alternative theory of exploitation as a *moral* argument against capitalism, the theory is deprived of any explanatory power, any capacity to explain capitalism's laws of motion, including its crises.



should keep in mind that the classic social democratic argument rests on a generalization of capitalist principles, a tendency to turn the historically specific laws of motion of one mode of production into a general law of nature, a refusal to acknowledge the specificity of capitalism and its systemic contradictions.

I suspect that Callinicos's chief motivation is a desire to rescue, if not technological determinism, then some weaker form of historical unilinearism, according to which all history, sooner or later, must follow a single inexorable logic leading to capitalism—the ultimate outcome of which will be socialism. That this is his intention is suggested by his invocation of various problematic and question-begging formulae which have the effect of uncritically inscribing capitalism (and its supersession) in the universal laws of history. For example, he takes issue with George Comninel's *Rethinking the French Revolution* (Verso, London 1987) on the grounds that his distinction between capitalist appropriation and commercial profit-taking fails to take into account 'the extent to which early modern merchant capitalism . . . provided a framework for the emergence of what Lenin called "transitional forms"'. The problem here is that the coupling of 'merchant' with 'capitalism' begs the central question, assuming precisely what needs to be demonstrated, that mercantile activity as such contains an impulse toward capitalism, and that no distinctions need to be made between cases where commercial profit-taking does imply capitalism, with its systemic logic of accumulation, and those where it does not. Unlike Comninel, Callinicos ignores the prevailing context of property relations within which these activities take place. This is Pirenne et al.—the identification of capitalism with trade and its generalization throughout all history—all over again.

The concept of 'proto-industrialization' is equally problematic, suggesting that 'the spread of rural industry' somehow contained within itself the germs of industrial capitalism. Again, no account is taken here of the differences between, on the one hand, a self-limiting rural industry still constrained by pre-capitalist social relations and showing no sign of a capacity to overcome those traditional restrictions, and, on the other hand, the specific case of England, whose already transformed economy, based on agrarian capitalism, was unique in its capacity to break through these age-old limitations, 'its ability to sustain continuing industrial and overall economic growth in the face of the crisis and stagnation of the traditionally predominant cloth export industry.'<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Callinicos could, if he tried, really demonstrate that rural industry in, say, France contained the seeds of capitalism—not just the *possibility* of capitalism, given some external impulse (such as prior developments in, and competitive pressures from, England), but an internal impulse toward it. He is not, however, entitled simply to conceptualize the problem away by using language loaded with the very presuppositions that are in question.

I can sympathize with the wish to recapture history for socialism at a time of general retreat from the socialist project. I do actually think

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<sup>12</sup> Brenner, *The Brenner Debate*, p. 325

that 'history is on our side'—but not in the sense that socialism has been inscribed in the inexorable laws of progress since the dawn of history, or that its coming is inevitable. For me, it is more a matter of the historically specific and unique possibilities and tensions created by capitalism which have put socialism on the agenda and produced the conditions for bringing it about. Even in Eastern Europe, where there are already signs of a return to old contradictions and class conflicts as the 'discipline' of the market takes hold, there may yet be an opportunity for the first time to test the proposition that the conditions of socialist emancipation reside in the specific contradictions of capitalism.

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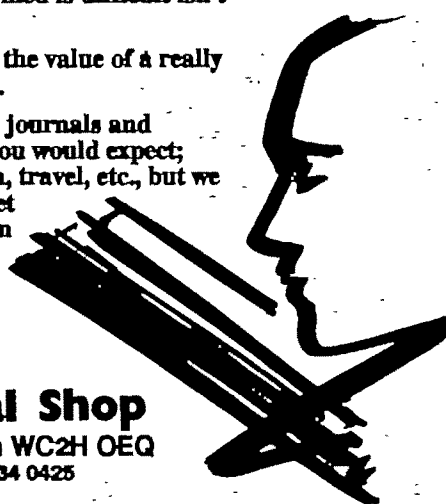
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# 85 *new left review*

## **ANATOMY OF LIBERAL MILITARISM**

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Following the 'revolutions of 1989' there was a widespread belief that a new era of peace was dawning in the world and that democracy was carrying all before it. One year later the sanguine hopes of that time have been belied by a pact between the recharged 'liberal militarism' of the West and a new but enfeebled 'barracks socialism' in the East. The West is using Communist weakness to inaugurate a 'new world order' with the largest bombing onslaught since the Vietnam War, thinly veiled nuclear threats, and a finely calculated decision to expose the fragile ecology of the Gulf to the pyrotechnics of modern warfare. Saddam Hussein has responded, to date, with a massive oil spillage and missiles targeted on non-combatants. But the misdeeds of Saddam do nothing to alleviate the West's responsibility, since it unleashed armed combat having helped him to acquire a formidable war-making capacity. While the Soviet Union supplied 40 per cent of Iraq's \$42 billion worth of arms-related imports in the eighties, Western aid and trade equipped Saddam with artillery, mortar-shell factories, reinforced bunkers, radar, dangerous chemicals and nuclear reactors. The belligerents in this war are products of contemporary capitalist civilization, riven as it is by profound antagonisms and inequalities, and incapable as it is of a responsible stewardship of the world's affairs.

The United States has claimed to be acting on behalf of the UN; but the UN General Assembly was not asked to vote on military action, and the economic sanctions which the General Assembly did support were not given any time to work. UN resolutions on occupied Palestine have been systematically ignored, while, as the war gets underway, Western war aims are being widened to embrace destruction of the Iraqi infrastructure and state. Economic sanctions were abandoned not because they had failed but because the sort of success they would have produced was not that sought by Washington. The original UN sanctions would very likely have led to negotiations in which the Palestinian issue would have had to be addressed. The war party in Washington thus combined the Israeli hawks, for whom any linkage was abhorrent, with those who were anyway looking for a signal demonstration of US military might. But while the war party won, narrowly, the war itself holds real dangers for its authors as well as for everyone else.

The Anglo-American drive to war in the Gulf took place against a background of recession and inflation, as Robert Brenner and John Grahl point out in this issue. The serious difficulties faced by Bush and Thatcher, and the speed of German unification, made both leaders anxious to regain the initiative. Victory over Saddam Hussein would, it was hoped, have an exemplary quality, confirming US world leadership. Washington seeks to demonstrate that its swollen military establishment is the big stick needed to police the 'new world order'—in this case, to keep oil prices low. Japan and Germany are reluctantly contributing to the war chest, topping up the donations received from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Gulf sheikhdoms. Yet Tokyo and Bonn were scarcely insisting on war-at-all-costs, since they did not really fear an oil shock anyway. Low oil prices will do little for the US or UK economies beyond encouraging a continuing irresponsible energy binge. As Grahl points out, it is highly significant that war has been unleashed by the two capitalist states whose economies are out of control.

David Edgerton argues that both US and British military policy has long exemplified what he calls 'liberal militarism', and that it now aims at the imposition of a global 'Pax Technologica', based on deployment of high-tech strike forces. The goal is to use modern communications and weaponry as a substitute for social strength, and as a means of destroying the life-support system of the enemy. Edgerton's argument is mainly derived from the history of Britain's military-industrial complex and its accompanying strategic doctrines, which he believes have been seriously underestimated and misconstrued by writers on both Left and Right. He argues that 'liberal militarism' achieves a distinctive fusion of economics and warfare, of technology and globalism, with the 'new imperialism' recycling the synoptic-warfare delusion of the 'old colonialism'. The British and the Americans have been prepared to trample lesser breeds under foot and wade through enemy blood proclaiming the rights of small nations, perpetual peace, and the liberty of the individual. Even when their cause has been just, their means have been disproportionate. In its latest phase, Anglo-American idealism is animated by delusions of technological omnipotence, in which satellites supposedly confer omniscience, and lasers are a surgical instrument of intervention. Animated by a false universalism that is blind to real conditions of life in the Third World, its only efficient concern is Western control of oil, fuelling an unsustainable and privileged way of life.

Oblivious alike to local aspirations and global ecology, the West insists upon pliant governments in the oil-bearing regions; but, as Robert Brenner points out, it has always had difficulty in finding them in the more

populous countries. Its enemies are thus hydra-headed. The only common tie between Mossadeq, Nasser, Gaddafi, Khomeini and Saddam has been their attempt to assert some degree of local control over economic resources. On the other hand, the type of ally on whom the West can rely—such staunch liberals as King Fahd, the Emir of Kuwait, the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, or the Sultan of Brunei—can scarcely be replicated in the larger states. Nothing is more certain than that the removal of the Iraqi leader would prepare the ground for some new challenge to the West—hopefully, next time, one that neither mirrors the West's military fetishism nor seeks to oppose its narrow elitism with a brutal authoritarianism. In an age of globalization and democratic revolution the West has gone to war with the unrealistic goal of preventing 'linkage' and stifling popular hopes, which its own actions can only feed.

Meanwhile, the authorities in Moscow and Beijing, having wavered on the military operation in the Gulf, are doing their own bit for the 'new world order' by experimenting with a 'barracks socialism' that still offers concessions to Western interests even as it ditches the more brazen advocates of capitalist restoration. The time when reform initiatives promised or provoked democratic upheaval has receded with great suddenness. In China the democracy movement was ruthlessly and swiftly suppressed; as the New Year opened, China was readmitted to the fold of the international community as activists were jailed in Beijing. In the Soviet Union political ferment has persisted, and elected or semi-elected bodies have continued to meet; but in the Baltic republics and elsewhere a thuggish military hand has threatened to oust popularly elected governments. In both countries the security forces now loom menacingly, propping up an ailing simulacrum of the old order. There are differences between the two Communist giants: the Chinese economy is in better shape than the Soviet economy, while repression in the Soviet Union is not yet so comprehensive as in China.

In this issue we publish a number of articles that tackle the causes and consequences of the implosion of Communist power. The crisis of Polish Communism a decade ago gave a foretaste of what was to come. Andrzej Walicki argues that the military takeover in Poland in 1981 did not signal the return of the totalitarian party-state, as was claimed at the time by many oppositionists, but rather a further stage in the decomposition of the 'Marxist-Leninist' state. The Jaruzelski regime was authoritarian but incapable of imposing itself on society, and suffered from a profound awareness of its own lack of legitimacy and competence. Walicki writes, as he explains in a prefatory note, as a right-wing liberal democrat who

believes that the entire project of a planned collectivist economy was unrealizable and bound to end in economic failure. Nevertheless, he believes that there should be a place for a reformed and democratic Left in Poland today, and that those aligned with both Walesa and Mazowiecki have done a disservice to Polish democracy by their demagogic recourse to anti-Communism and anti-leftism. For our part we point out that social-liberal currents in the region have greatly weakened their popular standing by espousing doctrinaire free-market policies to the advantage of the conservative-populist forces, enabling Walesa to defeat Mazowiecki, the Hungarian New Democrats to defeat the Free Democrats, or Landsbergis to oust Prunskiene in Lithuania. Their whole strategy of regeneration and democratization counted on support from Western governments and the advice of Western experts rather than on the productive energies and democratic mobilization of their own peoples. They have now received a rude education in Western priorities.

Robin Blackburn and Lynne Segal explore different dimensions of the Left's own crisis of perspectives. Blackburn surveys past and present socialist programmes in an effort to establish whether or not the failings of the Communist world should be laid at their door. He reconstructs a subterranean dialogue in which arguments passed from Bakunin to Kautsky, or from Trotsky to Hayek, arguing that those who wish for a future beyond capitalism cannot afford to ignore the political economy of failure in the East. Lynne Segal is also concerned to establish criteria of programmatic renewal, and to insist that the wreck of Stalinism should not lead to the jettisoning of socialism. She surveys the experience of the women's movement in the United States to argue that the concerns of socialist feminism offer a better foundation for advancing women's interests than do the quicksands of 'sexual difference'.

In a vivid essay of explication and contextualization, Peter Wollen follows the trajectory of the Russian Sots-artists Komar & Melamid, from their ironic inversions of Soviet Socialist Realism to their attempts to discover a new language built out of the nostalgic aroma and debris of their current home in the rustbelt town of Bayonne, New Jersey. Avoiding the depthlessness of the postmodern, Komar & Melamid, whether working in the Soviet Union or the United States, have striven for an uncomfortable, distanced, but engaged relationship to their surroundings. Nothing could be more antithetical to the complacent and conformist outlook of Britain's intellectual establishment, chronicled in Noel Annan's *Our Age*. The Clubland solipsism of this milieu is pointedly dissected by Christopher Hitchens's review of this book.



## Fin de Siècle: Socialism after the Crash

As we enter the last decade of the twentieth century, the ruin of 'Marxist-Leninist' Communism has been sufficiently comprehensive to eliminate it as an alternative to capitalism and to compromise the very idea of socialism.\* The debacle of Stalinism has embraced reform-communism, and has brought no benefit to Trotskyism, or social democracy, or any socialist current. Mummies of Lenin and Mao are still displayed in mausoleums in Moscow and Beijing as emblems of an old order that awaits decent burial. However, today's moribund 'Great Power Communism' is not a spectre stalking the globe, but an unhappy spirit, begging to be laid to rest. Yet a socialism willing to confront history and to engage with the most penetrating critics of the socialist project could enable a new beginning to be made. Significant anti-capitalist movements still exist, some influenced by the Communist tradition, but they lack a programme that could take us beyond capitalism. There are surviving regimes that call themselves Communist or Socialist, but whether or not they can point to real achievements (as can, say, Cuba

in the fields of public health and education) there can be no doubt that they too require an even more thoroughgoing renewal and reorientation—one aimed not just at constructing a genuinely democratic culture and polity, but also at discovering a new and viable socialist model of economy.

### Problems of Capitalism and Anti-capitalism

As we address the death-throes of the former Communist world, we should not forget the different, but very serious, ills of the capitalist world. The globe is now more firmly within the grip of the processes of capitalist accumulation; we should be all the more attentive to the price exacted by these processes, their harvest of mayhem and misery, destruction and neglect, division and irresponsibility. In the 1980s the workings of capitalism were associated with an obscene process whereby huge populations in the poorest countries found their prospect of development blocked by their debts to the richest, and by the latter's exclusion of their products. The distribution of economic and political power in much of the capitalist Third World proved compatible with widespread famines and epidemics of curable disease. Attempts by movements based among the poor to challenge this state of affairs were often met by merciless repression and death squads. Indeed there can be no doubt that the loss of human life, and extent of physical suffering, in the capitalist Third World in the eighties greatly exceeded that experienced in the countries ruled by Communist bureaucracy—a dismal comparison that does nothing to justify the stifling tyranny exercised by the latter, but which does put it in perspective. Meanwhile, the workings of capitalism in the metropolitan regions were marked by fundamental instability, mass unemployment, a buoyant arms trade, an escalating crisis of social provision, and—most serious of all—a gathering and global ecological crisis. While the Communist states have a terrible ecological record, their very economic failures have set some limits on the damage done. Capitalism, with its uncontrolled momentum and heedless rapacity, has brought humanity to a point where its powers of intervention in nature risk the destruction of the habitability of the globe.

The destructive and exploitative dynamic of capitalism, and its implication in an unfree social and political order, helps to provoke movements of contestation; but it is still hard to discern the outlines of a non-capitalist model. Anti-capitalist movements can do valuable work checking particular manifestations of the divisive or destructive logic of capitalist organization. Nonetheless if they won sufficient support, what could they offer at the level of regional or national government? And if dissatisfied with the world model presided over by the Group of Seven, what would they develop in its place? Answers to these questions will emerge, if at all, in large measure through impulses derived

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from the experience and reflection of anti-capitalist movements in the historic zones of capitalist accumulation in both the First and the Third Worlds. However, the anti-capitalist Left will have no credibility unless it can account for the dire experience of Communism since 1917. In some ways this fact is a tribute to Communism, since, for good or ill, its impact on the history of the twentieth century has been huge. Indeed the political movements and orders claiming allegiance to 'Marxism-Leninism', though now foundering on all sides, have been second only to liberal capitalism as protagonists and shapers of the age in which we live; ahead of fascism and colonialism, and capable of subsuming at least some of the appeal of nationalism and religion—again, for good or ill. While Communism was able to attract impressive organizers and intellectuals in the First World, it was generally less influential than the social-democratic variant of socialism. In the Third World, Communism was generally far more effective than social democracy, and the same could be said for the respective record of these two currents in the resistance movements of occupied Europe and Asia in the Second World War.

Someone as little suspect of sympathy for Communism, or any sort of socialism, as Ludwig von Mises was to describe the broad socialist tradition as the 'most powerful reform movement that history has ever known, the first ideological trend not limited to a section of mankind but supported by people of all races, nations, religions and civilizations.'<sup>1</sup> This is a tribute to Communism as much as to the largely Eurocentric social-democratic tradition. It is neither desirable nor possible to pass by the Communist experience as something without significance to those who would construct an alternative to capitalism. Nor should critical reflection content itself with simply denouncing the evident denial of democracy, including socialist democracy, that is the hallmark of Stalinism. If all that was lacking in these Communist regimes was democracy then its introduction would solve everything. But, however welcome moves towards democratization are, or would be, in the Communist or formerly Communist states, it is already clear that this is far from solving all their problems, and is certainly far from yielding an advance beyond both Stalinism and capitalism. There were always socialists and Marxists who denounced the repressive features of Communism, and who sought to identify the basic flaws in its conception of the socialist project.

### Bolshevism and Backwardness

It is interesting to recall Kautsky's first reaction to the Russian Revolution. This is how he later summarized it:

If they [the Bolsheviks] succeeded in making their expectations and promises come true, it would be a tremendous accomplishment for them and for the Russian people and, indeed, for the entire international proletariat. The teachings of Marxism, however, could then no longer be maintained. They would be proved false; but, on the other hand, socialism would gain a splendid triumph, the road to the immediate removal of all

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig von Mises, *Planned Chaos*, Irvington-Hudson, New York 1947, p. 124

misery and ignorance of the masses would be entered in Russia and pointed out to the rest of the world. How gladly I would have believed that it was possible . . . The most powerful, best founded theory must yield when it is contradicted by the facts. However, they must be facts, not mere projects and promises . . . [M]y expectant benevolence did not last long. To my chagrin, I saw ever more clearly that the Bolsheviks totally misunderstood their situation, that they thoughtlessly tackled problems for the solution of which all conditions were lacking. In their attempts to accomplish the impossible by brute force, they chose paths by which the working masses were not raised economically, intellectually or morally, but on the contrary, were depressed even deeper than they had been by Tsarism and the world war.<sup>2</sup>

Kautsky, writing this in 1931, could certainly dispute Stalin's empty boast to be constructing 'socialism in one country' in the name of orthodox Marxism. In *The Communist Manifesto* and in other writings, Marx and Engels famously insisted that a genuine socialism could only be built on the basis already laid by capitalism; in *The German Ideology* they had observed that socialism would require social overthrows in at least several of the most developed countries. From this classic Marxist conviction it followed that it was a complete delusion to attempt to 'build socialism' in one large backward country or, as was subsequently to be attempted, in a string of backward countries. By this Kautsky did not mean that nothing at all should be done and that Russia should simply be handed over to the Whites. His Menshevik friends were quite prepared to form a government in Georgia where they had majority support, and to promote social reforms. It was the specific abuses of party dictatorship and so-called War Communism, and their latter systematization and intensification under Stalin, that he attacked. Kautsky was on firm ground in arguing that Marx had insisted on the primacy of the struggle for democracy, and had outlined his notion of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in terms irreconcilable with a narrow party dictatorship. Kautsky is sometimes chided for 'economism', yet his critique of Bolshevik strategy was centred upon its ominous implications for the cultural and political development of the toilers. He warned that conspiratorial, secretive and hierarchical organization 'may be rendered necessary for an oppressed class in the absence of democracy, but it would not promote the self-government and independence of the masses. Rather, it would further the Messiah-consciousness of leaders, and their dictatorial habits.'<sup>3</sup>

The would-be socialist revolutions of the twentieth century have all taken place against a background of war devastation and capitalist failure, and each has had to struggle with a heavy weight of socio-economic backwardness as well as military encirclement. In each revolutionary process there have been primitive elements of democracy, as hitherto excluded and suppressed layers of the population asserted their elementary interests; but in each case a centralizing

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Bolshevism as a Deadlock*, London 1931, pp. 17–18, trans. amended

<sup>3</sup> Kautsky, *Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Ann Arbor 1964, p. 20. Kautsky's response to the Bolshevik Revolution is much illuminated by Massimo Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution, 1880–1938*, London 1979, pp. 218–25, 251–93.

political and military apparatus, while giving stability and direction to the revolution, has also foreclosed democratic development. The palpable threat of bloody counter-revolution has often appeared to justify the curtailment of democracy and diversity within the revolutionary camp, as happened in Russia with the outbreak of civil war in 1918. But significantly enough Bolshevism took a fateful step towards Stalinism only after victory in the civil war. Besieged by famine, fearful of demoralization, and believing that counter-revolution could easily stage a comeback, the leaders of the post-revolutionary state responded by banning rival parties and decreeing the formal suppression of factions within the ruling party. However, it was not until the severe economic crisis of the late twenties that monolithic and totalitarian principles of party organization and leadership over society were generalized. The practices and principles of 'high Stalinism' acquired added prestige both inside and outside Soviet borders in the aftermath of World War II. Stalingrad consecrated Stalinism—paradoxically, since Soviet victory was hugely assisted by that wartime relaxation graphically depicted in Grossman's *Life and Fate*.

### The Responsibility of Marxism

These days we are often told that the Russian Revolution was a 'Marxist experiment' and that it shows the perils of any socialist policy. Kautsky's reaction, and that of other Marxists—to be considered below—shows this to be a very partial and one-sided judgment. Nevertheless, for Marxists to disclaim any responsibility whatsoever for the October Revolution and the state which issued from it would be wrong. It is wrong because the leaders of the Soviet state, from Lenin to Gorbachev, have appealed to Marx, have sought to organize political support for this state on the basis that they were Marxists, and, at the subjective level, have believed that, in a difficult and unexpected situation, they acted in furtherance of the socialist cause as they understood it. Until quite recently the political credentials of the Soviet leaders were accepted by a powerful international movement. It is also wrong because the Soviet system has appeared to implement key aspects of the classical Marxist and socialist programme, implicating, in some degree, any politics that chooses public ownership as a means and popular welfare as a goal. The economic order of the Soviet Union was centrally based on state ownership and planning, while an insistent workerist ideology pointed—not always mendaciously—to achievements in the sphere of health and education, and to the social promotion of those of proletarian extraction. That Stalin was to be horrendously callous and a cynical traducer of Marxism is also true. However, we must take political doctrines and systems of belief as we find them, not only at their face value; historical materialists should be the last to object to such a method. For example, Christianity cannot only be judged by the doings of the saints, but should also accept some responsibility for the actions of Christian governments and, more generally, the impact of Christian Europe on the world. To suggest that the Atlantic slave trade or the Jewish holocaust reveal to us the essence of Christianity would be grotesque. But nevertheless, some connection can be found between Christian doctrine

and these events, or otherwise Christians would not have helped to bring them about. One such connection would simply be the traditional portrayal of heathens and Jews in popular Christianity.

Likewise, Western liberalism cannot just be judged on the basis of the ideas and intentions of Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, Marie-Jean Condorcet and Alexis de Tocqueville. The responsibility of liberal states for war or colonialism or famine would have to enter the picture, as would the characteristic blindspots of liberal thought. Similarly the gaps, errors and inadequacies in what Marx had to say about, for example, the rule of law, or the rights of the individual, or the need for checks and balances in political structures, or the abolition of commodity-money relations, do not constitute the essence of Marxism, as some would like to claim; but they may have some responsibility, direct or otherwise, for the practices of what used to be called 'actually existing socialism'.

Kautsky wrote *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Bolshevism at a Deadlock* partly because he felt some responsibility, as Lenin's teacher, for what was happening in Russia. His critique was not solely directed at political repression, but rather insisted that repression was itself the result of refusing to compromise with other forces and pushing the pace of economic socialization, first under War Communism and later in the period of collectivization and the Five Year Plan. Some might dismiss Kautsky's critique on the grounds that the Austrian Social Democrats, who were more inclined to follow his advice, failed to prevent a different sort of disaster—the victory of clerical reaction and Nazism. Alternatively one could question the record of Kautsky's Menshevik friends in Georgia or Russia itself. And the positions he had adopted in 1914 on the war certainly damaged his moral standing. However, the point here is not retrospectively to endorse Kautsky's position, another element of which will be considered below, but to insist that his ideas must be evaluated on their merits, and to contradict the myth cultivated by Stalin, and accepted by many anti-Communists, that the Soviet state was the only valid living embodiment of the Marxist programme. Kautsky was indeed struck by the fact that Leninism and Stalinism, far from being a realization of Marx's ideas, represented, to a significant extent, an atavistic return of the conspiratorial, Jacobin and doctrinaire strains within socialism, which Marx had spent much of his early political life combatting.

Thus while Marxism cannot escape implication in the fate of the Russian Revolution, neither should it be ignored that many of the most notable Marxists of the day—not only Kautsky, of course, but also Rosa Luxemburg—repudiated the practice of the party dictatorship from the very beginning. If Luxemburg had lived she would certainly have developed the remarkable and prescient observations contained in her last writings on the Russian Revolution. Some supporters of the new Soviet state recognized the revision of Marxism implied by Bolshevik strategy. Antonio Gramsci, sympathizing with the voluntaristic element in the October Revolution, described it as 'the Revolution

against "Capital" (that is, Marx's *Das Kapital*).<sup>4</sup> The subsequent history of the Soviet Union has been marked by successive critiques from Mensheviks, Social Democrats, Austro-Marxists, Council-Communists, Liberal Socialists, Left Oppositionists, Right Oppositionists, East European revisionists, Western Marxists, New Leftists, Euro-communists, and so forth, down to the most recent writings of such as Rudolf Bahro and Boris Kagarlitsky. This criticism and rejection has related in different ways both to the basic strategic line of march and to particular crimes and errors perpetrated along the way. Most of these critics have situated themselves squarely within the Marxist tradition. They have appealed to a Marx who bitterly attacked press censorship and the arbitrary exercise of state power, who insisted that the battle to win democracy must have priority, and who supported the accountability of political representatives. Marx's writings on Jacobinism and Bonapartism were animated by a deep hostility to political formations that sought to usurp social forces. As twentieth-century Marxists have grappled with the modern horrors of total war and totalitarianism, they have certainly had to develop new concepts, but without jettisoning the standpoint of historical materialism. Within this literature is to be found a critical self-reflection which extends or corrects Marx's ideas in areas where they had remained wrong, ambiguous or open to abuse. To refer back to the examples given previously, the Christian and liberal record also includes, to a lesser or greater extent, courageous, in some cases prophetic, opposition by a minority to militarism or slavery or religious and racial persecution. A doctrine's capacity for integral self-criticism and self-correction is as important as the starting point, since the latter is anyway bound to be mistaken or inadequate in various ways.

In recent times it has also become fashionable to decry Marxism as a utopian and messianic doctrine. Of course Marx himself explicitly rejected 'utopian socialism', and there is an absence in his work of elaborate programmes or proposals as to how the future socialist society should work. In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels conclude with a lengthy critique of prevailing socialist doctrines, arguing that they have an ideological and doctrinaire character. While it is often pointed out that Marx and Engels paid an extraordinary tribute to capitalism in the *Manifesto*, it is less often noted that this work is in fact a polemic against all then-existing conceptions of socialism. Marx insisted that socialism should arise from the real movement and not be cooked up by thinkers in their studies. Marx was, in general, far more committed to pursuing the materialist method in history than he was to particular programmatic notions. Reflecting this impulse, Marxist research in history, sociology, cultural studies and economics has given rise to a variety of schools imbued with a critical, sceptical and realist spirit. This is not to say that Marx did not enunciate important principles for judging whether or not the 'real movement'

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<sup>4</sup> David Forgacs, ed., *A Gramsci Reader*, London 1988, pp. 32-6. Unlike other enthusiasts for the Revolution, Gramsci was aware from the beginning that in Russian conditions it would mean a sharing of misery and want. See G. Fiore, *Gramsci: A Life*, London 1990, pp. III-13.

was in fact a movement towards human emancipation and self-realization. Marx wrote that 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all', and stipulated that the goal of communism was 'to each according to their need, from each according to their ability'—the first, from the *Manifesto*, being, I think, his own coinage, though it has echoes of Spinoza and Lessing; the second being an adaptation of a French socialist slogan.

### Socialism as Simplification, or as Complex Development?

The late-twentieth-century fate of Marxism and socialism lends a quite proper retrospective interest to the study of its earlier programmes and proposals. In Marx, and more generally in the Marxist tradition, there is often a tension between what might be called a *simplifying assumption* and a *developmental assumption*. The simplifying assumption implies that once capitalism is swept away the problems of production, or of law, or of political organization will be easily manageable. Lenin's peremptory theses in *The State and Revolution* would be a good example here. But in Marx, and in the tradition more generally, there is also a strong—possibly stronger—commitment to the idea that human social powers are cumulative, dialectical and various, and that in a socialist society some forms of complexity may be removed but others will be added. Thus Marx insisted that before the workers' movement was ready to be the (temporary) leading force in society, it needed to develop parties, trade unions, cultural associations, newspapers and so forth.<sup>5</sup> He favoured support for struggles over the extension of the suffrage, and over specific items of legislation such as the eight-hour day, both for their own sake and because it would strengthen the capacity of the movement. The classical Marxism of the early twentieth century argued for a rule of law (Karl Renner), for a democratic state, and for a plurality of forms of representation (despite their many disagreements, neither Luxemburg nor Kautsky subscribed to a monolithic or simplified notion of working-class interests, while with Gramsci the developmental thesis is given further impetus). Some of Lenin's later writings, such as *Left-wing Communism*, also contradict the simplifying approach.

In some famous passages Marx uses a rhetoric which implies that in economics too the 'simplification' thesis holds—everything will be transparent and readily understood after capitalism has been suppressed. This is certainly one of the messages conveyed by the strange proletarian 'Robinsonade' towards the end of the section on the fetishism of commodities in the first chapter of *Capital* Volume I, where the world working class, as a collective entity, is compared to Crusoe on his island.<sup>6</sup> The *Critique of the Gotha Programme* outlines general

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<sup>5</sup> These aspects of Marx's thought are emphasized, perhaps overemphasized, but certainly not invented, in my essay, 'The Theory of Proletarian Revolution', *NLA* 97, May–June 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume I, London 1990, pp. 171–2. The reference is at least half-playful and, in the context of the book as a whole, does not justify attributing to Marx the synoptic fallacy that the world economy could be run by an omniscient planner. The Comtean 'socialism' which did lead to such a view had no attractions for Marx. It was precisely *Capital* that persuaded Louis Althusser to reject the notion that social



principles of individual and collective provision, but has little useful to say about the coordination and socialization of production.

On closer inspection, Marx's contention in these passages is not that economic calculation becomes redundant after the expropriation of the expropriators, but that the rationality of applying labour to social need will become readily apparent once the veil of commodity entitlements has been lifted. Since Marx favoured a sweeping socialization of production in several of the most advanced capitalist states, it is difficult to think that he really envisaged a world planning authority deciding how much of everything should be produced. He was content to see positive references to cooperatives inserted into the programmatic declarations of the International Working Men's Association so long as they were not identified as the sole or privileged route to socialism. Another fact worth noting is that the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* did not offer the principle 'to each according to their work' as the sole principle of distribution in the initial or lower stage of socialism, but also argued for public provision for education, health and welfare. Among the chief purposes of this text was a challenge to propagandistic but misleading claims—the contention that labour is the sole source of all wealth is met by insistence that nature is just as important; and the claim that workers should receive the full fruits of their labour is met by itemization of the prior charges that should be made for investment. Notwithstanding such points, it must be conceded that Marx never sketched out exactly how the socialist economy would function. In all probability the unmet human need he could see around him required no very complex assessment while the major industrial processes still had a fairly rudimentary character.

Marx's excessive restraint was not, of course, practised by others. Popular interest in the ideas of Eugen Dühring probably derived from the fact that he happily speculated on the economic shape of a future when autonomous economic communes would be ruled only by principles of social justice and communal cohesion. Many of Dühring's ideas were half-baked, and some highly obnoxious (he was, for example, an anti-Semite). Engels's determination to combat his influence is understandable. But why did he feel the necessity to imitate Dühring's misguided system-building and 'world-schematism' rather than concentrate on the central political issues of economic prescription and programme? Newton, Lavoisier and Darwin scarcely needed to be defended; what did need attention was the economic and social programme of the workers' movement, yet in this area Engels's broad-brush phrases took matters little further forward.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> (cont.)

relations could be an 'expressive totality', possessed of the coherence and simplicity of an idea, and to prefer what he saw as Marx's concept of the mode of production as an 'already-given complex totality', which could never be commanded by a *principe de conscience*. See Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, London 1970, pp. 97, 180, 184.

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Moscow 1978. Though overshadowed by the disquisitions on dialectic, this work does contain, *fait de son mieux*, the most extensive discussion to be found in the works of Marx and Engels of the socioeconomic order they believed might supersede capitalism (see, in particular, pp. 343–79). Whatever the failings in Engels's work, he was always insistent as to both the limits placed by objective

## Criticism in Retrospect

The contemporary fate of Communism lends a new interest and topicality to the early critics of Marx or of socialism, such as Bakunin or J.S. Mill. Bakunin rejected what he saw as Marx's state socialism. Though he admired *Das Kapital* and approvingly quoted Marx's dictum to the effect that the emancipation of the workers can only be carried through by the workers themselves, he was worried that Marx had too narrow a conception of who was a worker, and feared that Marx's notion of a revolutionary state would simply lead to the 'reign of scientific intelligence, the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant and contemptuous of all regimes'. He observed:

The State is government from above downwards of an immense number of men, very different from the point of the degree of their culture, the nature of the countries and localities they inhabit, the occupation they follow, the interests and aspirations directing them—the State is the government of all these by some or other minority; this minority, even if it were a thousand times elected by universal suffrage and controlled in its acts by popular institutions, unless it were endowed with the omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence which the theologians attribute to God, it is impossible that it could know and foresee the needs, or satisfy with an even justice the most pressing interests in the world.<sup>8</sup>

Yet a close reading of Bakunin reveals that his real target was Lassalle and his notion of the *Volksstaat*; in fact Bakunin's criticisms goaded Marx to produce his own rejection of the statism of the German Social Democrats in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, as Daniel Guérin has pointed out.<sup>9</sup> Bakunin may have been prescient in his remarks on state socialism, but his own antidotes were not appropriate and

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<sup>7</sup> (cont.)

economic conditions and the importance of democratic development. Engels was, of course, responsible for one of the most memorable and prophetic utterances on the former topic to be issued by the founders of historical materialism. Referring to the situation of Munzer, the leader of the Peasant War of the early sixteenth century, he wrote: 'Not only the movement of his time, but the whole century, was not ripe for the realization of the ideas for which he had himself only just begun to grope. The class which he represented not only was not developed enough and incapable of subduing and transforming the whole of society, but it was just beginning to come into existence. The social transformation that he pictured in his fantasy was so little grounded in the then existing economic conditions that the latter were a preparation for a social system diametrically opposed to that of which he dreamt.' Friedrich Engels, 'The Peasant War in Germany', in Leonard Krieger, ed., *The German Revolutions*, Chicago 1967, p. 105. The Bolsheviks would have known this passage well, with its conclusion that nevertheless Munzer was right to act as he did. From the Menshevik position the important point would be that, whatever his dreams, Munzer was right to engage in a struggle that could not go beyond the horizon of some early bourgeois republic. In endorsing Munzer's struggle, Engels was certainly not recommending an attempted direct leap to communism regardless of conditions. He would have agreed with his friend Plekhanov that such an attempt in an isolated and backward country could only result in the sort of 'patriarchal despotism' practised by the Incas. Quoted by Michael Ellman, *Socialist Planning*, Cambridge 1990, p. 350.

<sup>8</sup> 'Marx, the Bismarck of Socialism', in L.I. Krimerman and L. Perry, eds., *Patterns of Anarchy*, New York 1966, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Guérin, 'Marxism and Anarchism', in David Goodway, ed., *For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice*, London 1989, p. 109.

were in fact close to those espoused by the simplifying tradition referred to above.

Whereas Bakunin had no economic system of his own, the same cannot be said of Proudhon who went further than Marx in outlining an alternative productive organization. Instead of proposing the stratification of society, he argued for a social economy, established by free and equal contracts between autonomous producers' associations, which should simply absorb and displace the tasks of government. Proudhon has been acclaimed a precursor of market socialism, in that he sought to harness rather than suppress economic competition. He also had a greater sensitivity than Marx to the significance of petty production and exchange. As Gustav Landauer, a leader of the Munich Revolutionary Council of 1918, was to write in 1914: 'Karl Marx and his successors thought they could make no worse accusation against the greatest of all socialists, Proudhon, than to call him a petit-bourgeois socialist, which was neither incorrect nor insulting, since Proudhon showed splendidly to the people of his nation and his time, predominantly small craftsmen and farmers, how they could achieve socialism without waiting for the tidy progress of big capitalists.'<sup>20</sup> While Landauer was not wrong in identifying a strain of Marxist arrogance towards the small producers, his point would have been far stronger had he explored the basis for their alliance with other social forces, including workers, rather than promoting the voluntaristic notion of a small-producer socialism. Both the 'late Marx' and the mature Kautsky did strive to get beyond dismissive condescension towards supposed 'rural idiocy' and to identify ways in which the labour market could champion the cause of peasants.<sup>21</sup> Although writers in the Marxist tradition sometimes wrongly depreciated the small producers, they were not wrong to suppose that the latter would be unable to stem the advance of capitalist accumulation. Proudhon's own economic ideas were themselves wrong-headed in various ways. Like some Marxists, he rejected the need for a rate of interest; while his proposed central bank, lacking criteria for investment, would have found its substance drained by the soft budget constraint. Proudhon's notion that economic organization made political democracy redundant drew from Engels the criticism that it would lead to an unaccountable and intensified state centralization, despite its author's mutualist or anarchist phrases.<sup>22</sup>

J.S. Mill expressed cautious enthusiasm for a decentralized socialism,

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Graham, 'Introduction', Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Ideas of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, London 1989.

<sup>21</sup> The *Critique of the Gotha Programme* had already denounced the idea that the non-proletarian classes were simply 'one reactionary mass'. For Marx's thinking on the peasantry, see in particular, Teodor Shanin, *The Late Marx and the Russian Road*, London 1983, and Robert Bideleux, *Communism and Development*, New York 1985.

<sup>22</sup> Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* Volume IV, *Critique of Other Socialisms*, New York 1990, pp. 126–9. Anyone tempted to make a plaster saint out of either Proudhon or Bakunin would be disabused by this author's informative, if overly partisan, account. At the same time, Marx and Engels were themselves fallible and, as Draper shows, their ideas developed through encounter with such chosen antagonists and collaborators as Proudhon and Bakunin.

but also showed some insight when he warned that it would not be practical, let alone desirable, for the state to take charge of the whole life of society. He asserted that 'the very idea of conducting the whole industry of a country by direction from a single centre is so obviously chimerical, that nobody ventures to propose any mode in which it should be done.'<sup>3</sup>

Mill was not specifically addressing the ideas of Marx or Marxists, but as socialist movements grew in influence they naturally attracted the critical attention of sociologists and economists. Towards the close of the nineteenth century it began to seem possible, as it scarcely did before, that socialists or social democrats might be in a position to lead the government in one or another of the major European states. There was commonly a feeling, detectable in the writings of Émile Durkheim or the prewar Max Weber, that the socialists should become more responsible and more willing to accept the realities and disciplines of power.<sup>4</sup> This line of criticism tended to encourage rather than contest the statist elements in socialist thinking. On the other hand, there were critics who challenged the coherence of Marx's account of capitalism—the most famous of these being the Austrian Böhm-Bawerk and such Russian Legal Marxists as Tugan-Baranovsky. Yet challenges to Marx's value theory of reproduction schemas did not explore their programmatic implications, or question the economic rationality of planning or public ownership.<sup>5</sup>

### Socialist Programmes

The political and economic thinking of the German Social Democrats now occupied a special position in Marxist thought, and was marked by a rejection of the 'state socialism' associated with Vollmar. The programme adopted at Erfurt in 1891 was to become a classical reference point. The first section, written by Kautsky, constituted a vigorous indictment of the exploitation, instability and inhumanity of the capitalist system. The latter was held to be preparing the ground for its own demise because of the social polarization it promoted and its own readily identifiable tendency towards more socialized production. The second part of the programme, written by Eduard Bernstein and concentrating

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<sup>3</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Socialism*, Buffalo, New York 1976, pp. 134–5.

<sup>4</sup> See Wolfgang Mommsen, 'Max Weber and Social Democracy', in Carl Levy, ed., *Socialism and the Intellectuals*, London 1987, pp. 90–105. Mommsen summarizes Weber's view at this time in the following formula. 'While there might be many varieties of socialism, the only viable one, compatible with modern civilization, was bound to be some type of centrally directed "planned economy"' (p. 92). For Durkheim, see Stephen Yeo, 'Notes on the Three Socialisms', in Levy, *Socialism and the Intellectuals*, pp. 219–70. For the idea that social antagonisms and economic fluctuations should be curbed from above by a national assembly of professional corporations, see Émile Durkheim, *Socialism*, New York 1962, pp. 245–7. Pareto's famous calculus of social equity was also prompted by engagement with socialism, note that he saw the latter as a fundamentally sentimental and irrational force which needed to be instructed and disciplined.

<sup>5</sup> It was, of course, possible to support a labour theory of value while not questioning capitalism, as did Ricardo, just as it was possible to be a socialist while rejecting the labour theory, as did Alfred Marshall. Böhm-Bawerk specifically separated his critique of Marx from his estimation of socialism; see Eugene Böhm-Bawerk, *Karl Marx and the Class of His System*, edited by P.M. Sweezy, New York 1948, pp. 117–18.

on immediate issues, centred on a call for the democratization of the German state—to include universal suffrage, broad civic liberties, and trade-union rights. It is worth noting that this programme contained proposals, such as votes for women and proportional representation, that were in the vanguard of democratic politics; while Engels was very happy with this, the first 'Marxist programme', he would have liked to see a further commitment to republicanism and federalism.

The subsequent electoral successes of the German Social Democrats, and the outbreak of the controversy over Bernstein's ideas, led to further elaboration of programmatic ideas. While Bernstein did not challenge the viability of socialization—indeed he argued rather that it was already happening under capitalism—his celebration of reformism helped to elicit from Kautsky a more thoughtful discussion of the problems of socialist production than had hitherto been offered by any socialist—or, for that matter, anti-socialist—thinker. In 'The Day After the Revolution' (1902) he registered the very considerable problems that a workers' government bent on socialization would face. He pointed out the organizational difficulty involved if 'in Germany the state is to become the director of production of two million productive plants and to act as the medium for circulation of this product, which will come to it partly in the form of the means of production and partly as means of consumption to be distributed to sixty million consumers, of which each one has a special and changing need.' While not discounting the possibility that means could be found to achieve this feat, he did reject any project for 'regulating the necessities of humanity from above... assigning to each one, barrack-fashion, his portion'. Such a crude solution would return civilization 'to a lower stage'. On the morrow of the revolution, money, wages and market prices could not be dispensed with. Socialist regulation would be principally realized through the larger enterprises, of which there were some eighteen thousand, and it would be made easier because the patterns of consumption and the rhythms of production had a definite constancy or statistical regularity. Nevertheless, the problem of coordination would be 'the most difficult which will come to the proletarian regime and will furnish it with many hard nuts to crack'. He concluded by insisting that there would be no need to do everything at once: 'As with money and with prices it is necessary to connect with that which is historically descended and not to build everything from the ground anew, but only to broaden out at some points or to restrict at others.'<sup>16</sup>

Kautsky's tentative and exploratory remarks might have encouraged the Marxist economists to address the problem of what should be done when 'the necessity for regulating production by the exchange of equal values will cease'. Instead it was to be a small number of economic critics of socialism who were to concern themselves, in either a friendly or hostile spirit, with probing the practical presuppositions

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Kautsky, 'The Day After the Revolution', in *The Social Revolution*, Chicago 1907, pp. 103–89, the quoted passages being on pp. 150–1, 152–3. See also the entry for Kautsky by T. Kowalik in John Eatwell, ed., *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Marxism Economics*, London 1990, pp. 218–21.

of a socialist society and economy. In these exercises the intellectual attraction of establishing the requirements of different forms of economy are allied to a conscious or unconscious intention of showing that such categories as price, rent, interest or saving would have their equivalent in any economic system. Among those who undertook such demonstrations were Friedrich von Wieser, Enrico Barone and N.G. Pierson. Though there was much that was interesting and pertinent in these critiques, they sometimes attributed oversimplified positions to Marx—for example, both Barone and Pierson foisted on Marx the notion that workers should receive the full fruit of their labour; a view which, as pointed out above, Marx and Engels had vigorously rejected in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. However, Barone was the first person to seek to identify the mathematical schema required for calculating values in a planned economy. He sought to demonstrate that this would involve many difficulties unsuspected by the advocates of socialism, and that it would oblige them to reinvent 'bourgeois' categories. Nevertheless if some seventy thousand equations could be solved then the 'Socialist Ministry of Production' could do the job required of it. Technically impressive though it was, Barone's essay was in fact not as practical and realistic as Kautsky's thoughts on the subject had been.<sup>7</sup>

The critiques offered by Pierson and Wieser were less formalistic and static, and more relevant to Marxism—a variant of socialism which had, after all, not defined itself by a radical refusal of all economic categories. Pierson was encouraged by Kautsky's lecture on 'The Day After the Revolution' to press for further elaboration of how the Social Democrats proposed to run a publicly owned economy. A notable feature of this critique, which went unanswered so far as I am aware, was that it posed the question of how prices would be arrived at for 'trade' between different socialist states. The critique of Wieser was both the most suggestive and, it seems, the least hostile in intent. While evincing some sympathy for, as well as interest in, socialism, Wieser questioned the appropriateness or even possibility of central state direction of economic activity:

The one will or command which, in war or for legal unity, is essential and indispensable as the connecting tie of the common forces, detracts in economic joint action from the efficacy of the agency. In the economy, though it have become social, work is always performed fractionally... Part-performances of this sort will be executed far more effectively by thousands and millions of eyes, exerting as many wills, they will be balanced, one against the other, far more accurately than if all these actions, like some complex mechanism, had to be guided and directed by some superior control. A central prompter of this sort could never be informed of countless possibilities, to be met with in every individual case, as regards the utmost utility to be met with in given circumstances or the best steps to be taken for further advancement and progress.<sup>8</sup>

The mainstream of Marxist economics did not take up the challenge

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<sup>7</sup> For Barone's article of 1908, see F.A. von Hayek, ed., *Collectivist Economic Planning*, London 1935, pp. 245–90. Pierson's article also appears in this collection.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich von Wieser, *Social Economics* (1914), London 1927, pp. 396–7.

of these programmatic critics, but instead claimed that finance capital itself was refining techniques of economic calculation and control that could be inherited by a workers' government when the time was ripe. At this stage the nation-state was not yet established as the sole or privileged locus and agent of public ownership and planning. The existence of influential socialist municipalities, cooperatives and trade unions made for a more variegated, albeit hazy, vision of the future socialist economy.

The developing socialist movement needed ways of imagining the future, and a common mode was the utopian (or, with Jack London, dystopian) novel, such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Back* (1887), William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) and Theodor Hertzka's *Freiland* (1876). Bellamy's book, which was to go through many editions, projected a peaceful evolution to collectivism on the basis of trends already present in late-nineteenth-century capitalism that were seen as counter to the wasteful and anarchic features of capitalist competition—the formation of trusts and syndicates and the activities of municipal reformers. However, in Bellamy's view state control of the whole economy would result to a significant extent from the fact that the public sector would prove to be vastly more effective as a provider, and popular as an employer, than the remaining private sector. William Morris found Bellamy's vision repugnant. Bellamy's portrait of happily regimented workers provoked from Morris the remark: 'If they brigaded me into a regiment of workers I'd just lie on my back and kick.' Bellamy's socialistic order was to have been introduced by popular consent when 'public opinion had become fully ripe', but its central institutional expression was to be 'a single syndicate representing the whole people'. Morris believed this to be inimical to the variety and self-government that should be defining features of a genuine socialist society. Seeing a link between Bellamy's utopia and the work of the Fabians, with their identification of socialism with statification, he wrote: 'For the rest I neither believe in state socialism as desirable in itself, nor, indeed, as a complete scheme do I believe it to be possible. Nevertheless some approach to it is sure to be tried, and to my mind this will precede any complete enlightenment on the new order of things. The success of Mr Bellamy's book, deady dull as it is, is a straw to show which way the wind blows.'<sup>29</sup>

Morris's own utopian novel, *News from Nowhere*, was written partly in opposition to Bellamy. Although work is given an important role in the novel, specifically economic mechanisms—beyond a generalized invocation of gift-markets—are not described. In this respect Hertzka's

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Edward Thompson, *William Morris*, London 1977, p. 575. See also pp 542, 693. Morris's lectures and essays on socialism combined a most eloquent indictment of the degradation of the human and natural environment by 'commercial war' with occasional recourse to the 'simplifying' thesis. But the latter is balanced and qualified by tributes to Marx's doctrine of necessary social 'evolution', by his rejection of 'asceticism', and by his ready acknowledgement that his own vision was partial. In 'How We Live and How We Might Live', he writes of the need for 'regulation of the markets', while he opens 'The Society of the Future' with the assertion that 'monopoly must come to an end'. See, *Political Writings of William Morris*, edited by A.L. Morton, London 1979, pp. 145, 188.

*Freeland*, in many ways less appealing and less socialist than *News from Nowhere*, did attempt a more detailed picture of how free associations of producers might regulate their affairs. For example, it addressed the problem of how an overall equality was to be guaranteed in a competitive system of production and exchange. There was free movement of workers who could demand that more successful, better-paying collectives take them on. Original members of the successful collective received a modest seniority premium but had to share their prosperity with newcomers. The device proposed by Hertzka did have a definite technical ingenuity, as A. Chilosì has shown. We should note, however, that Hertzka's utopia took the form of a colonizing fantasy, set in Africa, complete with attempts to reform the morals of the native; in this and many other ways *Freeland* is scarcely a vision that contemporary socialists would wish to embrace.<sup>20</sup>

In so far as the Second International parties elaborated a vision of the future, it was to remain that outlined by Engels, by Kautsky, and by Bebel in his *Woman and Socialism*. The Marxist economists preferred to study, and argue about, the workings of capitalism. The 'revisionist' Bernstein and the orthodox Hilferding both argued that the advance of capitalist trustification and financial cartelization were unwittingly creating the instruments of a future socialist order. Kautsky was to develop a strong reservation about the possible implications of this type of argument: 'This comfortable conception of an imperceptible transition to the state of the future, caused by the diligent activities of the capitalists themselves, leads merely to this: the main task of the proletariat would then be to support the capitalists, for to do so would be to foster the liberation of the proletariat itself.'<sup>21</sup>

### Leninism and Stalinism

With respect to mainstream Marxism, Lenin's Bolshevik current came to represent a species of political voluntarism. Lenin's concept of the revolutionary party was criticized for its Jacobinism and commandism by Luxemburg and Trotsky, as well as by the Mensheviks.<sup>22</sup> But in the context of an incoherent autocracy Lenin's cult of party organization and discipline made sense to many militants. Subsequently, the industrial carnage of the First World War, and its devastating impact on the lives of some hundreds of millions of people,

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<sup>20</sup> A. Chilosì elaborates the sophisticated implications of the specific form of the 'right to work' outlined in Hertzka's *Freeland* in 'The Right to Employment Principle and Self-Managed Market Socialism', EUP Working Paper, European University Institute, Florence 1986. In Hertzka's novel the settler colony becomes a major industrial power set in the heart of Africa; it defeats the warlike African Kingdom of Ethiopia and helps to inspire a bloody revolution against the Tsar. Theodore Hertzka, *Freeland, a Social Anticipation*, London 1891, especially pp. 96-7 for the 'model statute', and p. 131 for the problems with the natives: 'Their military organization had to be broken up, their immorality suppressed, their prejudice against labour overcome.' Hertzka was himself an Austrian economist of some prominence, having helped to found the Association of National Economists.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky*, p. 232.

<sup>22</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy* (1904), New York 1934; Leon Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, Geneva 1904, (*Nos tâches politiques*, Paris 1970).



could appear to justify not only the Bolshevik seizure of power but also the ruthlessness with which they defended this seizure. The Bolsheviks were scarcely disposed to take lessons in humanitarianism from those who bore responsibility for the atrocities of Ypres and the Somme, or used starvation to cow central Europe in 1918–19, or from statesmen who savagely repressed the aspiration to colonial independence.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, the Bolsheviks of 1917 were impressed—probably overimpressed—by the workings of the German war economy, which was seen as demonstrating the effectiveness of physical planning; however, neither Switzerland nor the sealed train were good vantage points from which to make this assessment. In *The State and Revolution* Lenin wrote of how the economy could be organized as a single syndicate, echoing traditional socialist views about the achievements of trusts. The outbreak of civil war in March 1918, and the pressure of famine, led to the institution of what was later called 'War Communism', with far-reaching attempts to replace all exchange by requisitioning. While this was effective militarily, it cast a blight on small-scale production in this backward country. It was also associated with an intensified and hardened Bolshevik sense of destiny that would brook no opposition.<sup>24</sup>

Victory brought no political relaxation. In 1921 Bolshevik messianism was stepped up to justify an increasingly pervasive and truculent monopoly of power. Within the space of a few months the remnants of pluralism in the soviets were suppressed, the ban on factions within the Party adopted, Menshevik Georgia invaded, the revolt of the Kronstadt sailors crushed militarily, and Makhno's 'green' partisans hunted down. The stage had been set for Stalin.

Lenin certainly does not carry full responsibility for Marxism-Leninism—a doctrine unknown to him. Lenin, though not a systematic thinker, in some ways developed a greater grasp than Marx of the necessary complexity of both politics and economics. Together with some other Russian Marxists, notably Bogdanov, Lenin developed a sense of the necessarily if partially autonomous significance of political organization. The voluntarism of his earlier writings was thus not devoid of real intuition. It was not until his last years that he appreciated the very double-edged discovery he had made, helping to fashion a political force that could be used for purposes he did not approve. His last writings, attacking the autonomy and arrogance of the new Soviet bureaucracy, reflect this painful realization. As Marxist historians like Isaac Deutscher and Moshe Lewin have shown, he was just beginning to display some sense of the real dangers when he

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<sup>23</sup> For this context, see Arno Mayer, *The Politics and Diplomacy of Peace-Making*, Princeton 1970, and *Why Did the Huns Not Die?*, London 1990, pp. 4–8.

<sup>24</sup> The key text on the introduction of 'War Communism' is probably 'Report on Combating the Famine', available in Meghnad Desai, ed., *Lenin's Economic Writings*, London 1989, pp. 268–86. For the influence of the German war-economy model on Lenin's thinking, see the editor's introduction (p. 27), and also Meghnad Desai et al., 'The Transition from Actually Existing Capitalism', *NLR* 170, July–August 1988, pp. 61–78.

was overwhelmed by the practical and historical context, and struck down by illness.<sup>25</sup>

✓ This is not to say that either Lenin or Trotsky can escape the charge of having themselves in some degree prepared the ground for Stalin by their often ruthless practice of a party dictatorship. One of Lenin's worst texts from the revolutionary period, 'How to Organize Competition' (1918), bristles with ill-considered and extreme formulations. For some reason Lenin decided not to publish the text, but it was lying in the archives, ready for publication in *Pravda* in 1929, allowing Stalin to claim Leninist credentials for his pitiless ferocity.<sup>26</sup> In a careful assessment of the period *Before Stalinism*, Samuel Farber has recently demonstrated how prophetic Luxemburg was in her 1918 indictment of Bolshevik practice. Indeed Farber shows that the Bolsheviks even  
A violated their own claimed attachment to soviet authority and legality. Within months of the Revolution, the Party organs usurped the soviets, curtailed or suppressed pluralism within the revolutionary camp, manipulated elections, permitted or encouraged lawless repression, prevented the development of an independent press or system of justice, and reinstated one-man management in industry. Farber's detailed and documented account distinguishes between early Bolshevik rule and Stalinism, but connecting threads are clearly established. If this work has a weakness it is that it does not give sufficient weight to the terrible domestic and international context, with its pressures of war and famine—though Farber does argue that the latter was inadvertently compounded by War Communism.<sup>27</sup>

Lenin and Trotsky themselves came to acknowledge that the economic policies of War Communism, whatever their military rationale, had contributed to a wrenching economic dislocation. In Russia, as in the rest of Europe, the imposition of a war economy, far from furnishing an antechamber to socialism, did not stave off, and may even have aggravated, famine and epidemic. The failures of economic policy compounded the political problem, setting the scene for popular protest and what Farber calls 'surplus repression'. Bertrand Russell, after a visit to Russia in 1920, published a critique of the Bolsheviks, which argued that many of the most regrettable and repressive features of Bolshevik rule were associated with economic failure. While readily acknowledging the role played in this failure by foreign blockade, he

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<sup>25</sup> Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, London 1970; Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin*, Harmondsworth 1966, pp. 238–70.

<sup>26</sup> V I Lenin, 'How to Organize Competition', *Selected Works* Volume 2.

✓ <sup>27</sup> Samuel Farber, *Before Stalinism*, Cambridge 1990. Farber discusses War Communism on pp. 43–50, and throughout notes the many dissenting voices who resisted Bolshevik policy or practice from within the Revolutionary camp. For further evidence, see also Vladimir Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October*, London 1990. Farber considers that the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly can be justified, but not the subsequent suppression of soviet democracy, commencing in the spring and summer of 1918; thus the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, supposedly the permanent expression of the sovereign institution of the country, only met rarely in 1918 and not at all in 1919 (p. 29). Farber's type of criticism is, of course, not new, though it is comprehensive and systematic. See, for example, the last chapter, 'Defeat in Victory', in Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, Oxford 1954. But Deutscher, like Victor Serge in his *Memoirs*, (Oxford 1962), makes greater allowance for the pressures of war.

insisted that the Bolsheviks must share the blame for the collapse of // agriculture, because of the literally counter-productive effect of their insistence on seizing peasant produce rather than simply setting a tax.<sup>28</sup>

Inside the young Soviet republic, Martov, the Menshevik leader, came to accept the October Revolution as a *fait accompli* and urged that it should be defended against its enemies. But he vigorously attacked the 'political terrorism' and 'economic utopianism' of Bolshevik policy. // Since 1905 Martov had argued that soviets and trade unions should make an independent contribution to the vitality of civil society—their independence within the larger process of bourgeois-democratic revolution should be championed by Marxists. Consistent with this position, Martov opposed dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in 1918 while still favouring an independent role for the soviets and trade / unions. Elections showed this to be a popular view within the Russian working class, and the Mensheviks recovered much support they had lost to the Bolsheviks in 1917. Martov, unlike Kautsky, tried to establish a *modus vivendi* with the Bolsheviks during the civil war, but both men agreed that war had provided extremely adverse conditions for / any socialist or democratic project. Appointed President of the Socialization Commission in 1919, Kautsky was appalled at the state of economic collapse, and argued for priority to be given to restoring production; he urged that a system of workers' and consumers' control, rather than 'centralized bureaucracy', would attain that end. For his part, Martov opposed the European war more consistently and radically than Kautsky. He argued that imperialist war had disrupted and divided the working class, swelling a deracinate and desperate lumpen proletariat that was vulnerable to any demagoguery. Martov wrote of the new Soviet republic that 'here is flourishing . . . "trench army" quasi-socialism based on the general "simplification" of the whole of life.' While Bolsheviks expressed the extremism of this layer, / so did the Black Hundreds; Martov reluctantly conceded a preference for the former over the latter. But he believed that the Bolsheviks, through their policy of armed requisitions, were digging a gulf | between themselves and the direct producers in either the town or the countryside.<sup>29</sup>

Justifying the New Economic Policy in October 1921, Lenin himself acknowledged: 'We made a mistake of trying to change over directly

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<sup>28</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (1920), London 1948; see in particular pp. 47–55, 114–23.

<sup>29</sup> Kautsky's views on socialization in 1918 are discussed in Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky*, pp. 233–4. For Martov, see Jane Burbank, *Insolent and Revolution: The Russian View of Bolshevism 1917–1922*, Oxford 1986, pp. 16–35, especially pp. 19, 32–4; also Julius Martov, *The State and the Socialist Revolution*, New York 1938; and *Le bolchevisme mondial*, Paris 1934. Note that as a Marxist, Martov championed both a strengthening of the democratic institutions of civil society and the construction of an authoritative, democratic state. Rather than counterposing the state to civil society, he argued that the former, if democratic, would be the guarantee of the latter. Indeed he attacked the Bolsheviks for a sort of lumpen anarchism which failed to see the importance of establishing a lawful and democratic polity based on an authoritative state. Martov died in 1923.

to Communist production and distribution.' As is well known, Lenin's subsequent economic thinking made large concessions to the need not only for internal markets and petty commodity production but also for foreign investment.<sup>30</sup>

### The Moment of Communism

The attempts made by Lenin and Trotsky to answer Kautsky and other socialist critics—including, in Trotsky's case, defence of the invasion of Menshevik Georgia—belong to their most unhappy and unconvincing exercises in polemic, since they insisted on justifying measures of repression that were not military necessities and which actually weakened the legitimacy of the Soviet republic. Yet their later justifications of the original Bolshevik seizure of power did contain one powerful refrain. They argued that the Bolshevik Revolution was simply a holding operation: staving off the terrible prospect of counter-revolutionary victory in Russia and securing a base that might assist the advance of movements that challenged the ruling classes of the advanced countries—whether labour movements or national-liberation movements. Today we know the appalling cost of Stalinism and the often negative impact of the Soviet 'example'. However, we do not know what bloody consequences would have flowed from a victory by the Whites. While the Soviet peoples have good cause to rue the horrendous cost of Stalinism, the survival of the Soviet Union has had profound, and often positive, implications for those outside Soviet borders. Most obviously the immense and irreplaceable Soviet contribution to the defeat of Nazism, but also the real, though less quantifiable, Soviet contribution to persuading Western ruling classes to cede ground to anti-colonial liberation movements and to make concessions to their own domestic labour movements. Though other factors are certainly at work, it is interesting to note that welfare and social provision were often at their most generous in those European states bordering the former Soviet bloc, and were often introduced at a time when the prestige of the Soviet Union was at its high point, in the early postwar period. In Western Europe today we are still enjoying the fruits of 1945, in the form of enlarged democratic rights and more generous social provision for education and welfare. Similarly the great arc of postwar decolonization owed much to the challenge and competition resulting from the need for the West to contend with a global rival.<sup>31</sup> To point out such facts is not to justify Stalin's callousness and criminality, since the great purges and famines for which he was responsible weakened rather than strengthened the Soviet Union.

In a letter to a Russian correspondent, Marx wrote that he did not intend to impose a *marche générale* upon history such that each people had to pass through the sequence of feudalism, capitalism and socialism as laid out in *The Communist Manifesto*. With the collapse of the Communist alternative it can seem, however, that capitalism has itself

<sup>30</sup> Meghnad Desai, *Lenin's Economic Writings*, pp. 301–44.

<sup>31</sup> Such features of the Soviet impact on mid-twentieth-century history are explored by Eric Hobsbawm in 'Goodbye to All That', *Marxism Today*, October 1990.

imposed a *marche générale*, albeit one that no longer terminates in socialism. However, it should be remembered that the perspective of Marx's historical materialism principally concerned itself with the broad development of civilization in the world as a whole, and not with necessarily subordinate developments within one or another nation-state, however large. From this standpoint both the advent of a non-capitalist social order, the Soviet republic, and its prospective disintegration today, should not be seen in isolation, but rather as major shifts within the larger pattern of world politics and economics. The Bolshevik victory of 1917–20 or the Soviet role in the victory of 1945 did not put socialism on the agenda, even in Russia; but, in conjunction with antagonisms internal to the leading capitalist nations and empires, they did help to bring about a new global order, both limiting and threatening prevailing forms of capitalist and imperialist power.

### The Soviet Hybrid and Its Flaws

The very distorted and costly achievements of the Soviet Union as a non-capitalist power, and the more or less faithful reproduction of the central features of the Soviet system throughout the Communist world, give some support to the idea that it represented a wholly distinct and alternative political and social order to capitalism. But it is now clear—something few suspected before—that this rival order fell short of dynamic integration as a full-blown alternative system to capitalism. The Soviet economy was always a socioeconomic hybrid and often failed to find a way to exploit the contradictions of the dominant capitalist world order—its only hope of undermining that dominance and ensuring its own complex development. Yet the Soviet polity was sufficiently densely structured to have a considerable margin of manoeuvre vis-à-vis the global ascendancy of capitalism. Stalin's forced collectivization and industrialization programmes were driven forward by a quasi-military mobilization of cadres who, in a hostile world, saw Stalin's 'general line' as essential to the survival of their party and the state it controlled. The party apparatus inhabiting and dominating the state used a combination of military-style planning from above and cadre mobilization from below to impose the construction of a command economy. But the pressure of the global capitalist environment could not be entirely evaded, nor could the residues of capitalist social relations be entirely suppressed. Both Victor Serge and Leon Trotsky pointed to the 'totalitarian' logic by which Stalinism intensified invigilation, mobilization and repression in Soviet society in order to mask old and new forms of social differentiation and fragmentation. In evident contrast to the later use of this concept, Trotsky saw the totalitarian features of both fascism and Stalinism as an extraordinary and non-sustainable political form, which could only gain a temporary ascendancy because of the depths of social disorganization and crisis.<sup>32</sup> Trotsky's analysis implied that

<sup>32</sup> Martin Malia observes: '[T]he term *totalitarian*, coined by Mussolini with a positive connotation to designate his new order and first applied in a negative sense to Stalin's Russia by Trotsky, was taken up by Hannah Arendt to produce a general theory of perverse modernity' Z, 'The Stalin Mausoleum', *Dandelion*, Winter 1990, p. 300. Of course Trotsky would not have endorsed the use of this concept made by his former follower

the totalitarian dictators were far less powerful than they seemed, and that they were doomed to be ground between, on the one hand, the superior strength of the leading capitalist nations, and, on the other, the popular resistance that their rule inevitably engendered.

1 Kautsky was also unimpressed by Stalin's claims to have inaugurated a new and superior economic and political order. In his unjustly neglected, if also one-sided, critique of Soviet economic forms in the twenties and thirties, Kautsky pointed out that they lacked the requisite social basis and capacity for true socialization and sustained, diversified economic growth.<sup>33</sup> He argued that it was simply beyond the competence of the Soviet bureaucracy to administer a complex modern economy, and that instead it would sponsor only that type of development which corresponded to its own narrow interests and capacities. Kautsky himself considered that the Soviet state had an essentially bureaucratic-capitalist relationship to the peasantry and, incipiently, to all direct producers. Democratic rights and controls were required to ensure the quality of industrial advance and to ensure a harmonious collaboration between peasants and proletarians, workers by hand and workers by brain. He advocated not only a 'democratic revolution' but also a path of economic development that gave assistance to small property holders as it encouraged voluntary forms of cooperation, and would oblige the public sector to prove its superiority in competition with a continuing private sector.

Despite all the claims made for the first Five Year Plans, Stalin himself recognized the limits of his own administrative model by retaining elements of a money-commodity economy that were associated with capitalism. Indeed it can now be seen that in most of the Soviet-style regimes such institutions retained a key role: money has been the main medium of exchange, wages the essential reward for labour,

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<sup>32</sup> (cont.)

For him totalitarianism was a delusive as well as dangerous project. In 1940 he wrote 'A totalitarian regime, whether of the Stalinist or fascist type, by its very essence, can only be a temporary transitional regime. Naked dictatorship in history has generally been the product and the symptom of an especially severe social crisis, and not at all of a stable regime. Severe crisis cannot be a permanent condition of society. A totalitarian state is capable of suppressing social contradictions during a certain period, but it is incapable of perpetuating itself' Leon Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, New York 1940, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> The elements of Kautsky's view are already present in *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, first published in 1918; they are further developed in *Bolshevism as a Deadlock* published in 1930 and, with a new introduction, in 1931. Kautsky wrote 'The Soviet leaders would think themselves very clever and economical if they found means of trebling the number of available machines by the adoption of methods which reduced the productive capacity, intelligence and independence of the existing industrial workers to a minimum. They have failed to realize that the vital problem is to raise the efficiency of labour, and that the products of labour would then yield a surplus automatically, while such a policy would at the same time increase the capacity for turning out new and improved means of production. The Bolsheviks would not profit by recognizing this, for this method of increasing the productive capacity of the workers pre-supposes a high degree of freedom, and this requires a far-reaching democracy.' *Bolshevism as a Deadlock*, pp. 14-15. See also Salvadori, *Karl Kautsky*, especially pp. 301-12. Kautsky knew both of Soviet Taylorism and of the role of leading Mensheviks in resisting it.

petty production common in the agricultural sector, foreign trade of significance for important branches, and so forth. According to a particular type of Marxist orthodoxy, whether simple utopianism or bureaucratic voluntarism, these economic mechanisms have been identified as elements of capitalism (though nearly every one of them actually long preceded the rise of capitalism). Although the Communist states have often been tempted by strategies of national autarchy, this has usually led to stagnation and heightened repression; in the end they usually signalled the abandonment of such autarchy by blatant concessions to capitalism, as in China in the 1970s.

Stalin sometimes appeared to recommend and practise such autarchic models of development—especially after 1945 in the context of the enlarged, but still backward, 'socialist camp'. But research into Soviet economic development shows it to have been most rapid in the thirties and forties when there were extensive exchanges with the West. It is an extraordinary fact that in the early thirties more than half of UK and US machine exports were destined for the Soviet Union; in some branches the figures were over 90 per cent. It was the massive import of Western technology in the thirties and forties that laid the basis for Soviet growth up to the end of the fifties.<sup>34</sup> We should not forget that the Cold War policies of the West—from Cocom to other forms of economic and military blockade—were successfully designed to cut off the Soviet Union from Western technology, and also forced Soviet planners to waste huge resources on military expenditures. In the thirties and forties Stalin was able somewhat crudely to exploit contradictions within the world-capitalist system because these took the form of clashes between the most powerful capitalist states. In the period after 1945 the capitalist world became increasingly politically unified, and thus afforded few openings to Soviet diplomacy. An alternative approach would have been to seek potential allies within the leading capitalist states, in the shape of labour and social movements. But Stalin's recourse to repression and political isolation within the Soviet Union made it impossible for him to pursue this line with any success. Soviet insistence that Marshall Aid should be rejected by the new 'People's Democracies' betrayed a costly nervousness of the perils of capitalist encroachment.

As more reliable Soviet data becomes available it will be possible to establish the contribution made by Stalin's repressions—either forced collectivization or the Gulag system—to Soviet 'primitive accumulation'. It is quite possible that the overall balance-sheet will prove deficitary in purely economic as well as human terms. Though more surplus was for a time seized from the peasantry, agricultural output was permanently damaged. It is true that the wretched inmates of the Gulag built power stations and railway lines in conditions that no free workers would have tolerated. But typically these projects were poorly planned and executed in a way that was extremely wasteful of valuable materials and machines as well as lives. The repressive apparatus was a costly, parasitic growth. Even in the Kolyma gold mines it seems that free labour is more productive today than the

<sup>34</sup> A.C. Sutton, *Western Technology and Soviet Development* Volume II, Stamford 1971.

forced labour of the past. Other considerations aside, the increasing propensity of forced labourers to revolt, as in Vorkuta in 1953, became disruptive. When millions were released from the Gulag in the fifties, the reason was partly social pressure—but perhaps also partly that the forced labour system was proving cumbersome, expensive and inefficient.<sup>35</sup>

### Plan, Market and Democracy

Yet was there an alternative? As an opponent of 'socialism in one country', Trotsky attempted to show that there was. Some of his best ideas in this area are also the least well known. Thus in 1930 Trotsky came up with a bold plan to achieve a double objective: firstly, to help the Soviet Union break out of economic isolation, and secondly, to promote the cause of the West European working-class movements. He proposed that the Soviet government should invite the West and Central European Social Democrats to join it in devising and implementing the Five Year Plan. He pointed out that the Soviet Union desperately needed to buy machinery. He also pointed to the growing scourge of unemployment in the rest of Europe. In such a situation the internationalist—or, as Marx would have put it, 'cosmopolitan'—approach would be to draw up a programme of economic and social advance between the Soviet Government and such other European governments as would be willing to join in—those of Austria, Germany and Britain, for example, where the workers' parties were in government or could hope to form a government. Trotsky saw this proposal as the economic counterpart to the principled strategy of proposing a United Workers Front.<sup>36</sup> He did not fear that economic collaboration on the Plan between the Soviet government and social-democratic governments would 'contaminate' the rationality of the transitional economy by the admixture of capitalist elements, given that the Soviet economy inescapably had to incorporate capitalist elements, the only choice being whether they derived from advanced or backward forms of capitalism. Though Trotsky favoured planning, he did not see this as a comprehensive or self-sufficient social process. In *The Revolution Betrayed* (1937) he acknowledged that heavy industry was advancing rapidly, but he argued that many of the vaunted achievements of the Five Year Plans were illusory. He pointed to the lasting damage wreaked by forced collectivization, and stressed the poor quality of much that was produced by industry. At several points his economic critique echoed the analysis of the Left Oppositionist, Christian Rakovsky. According to Rakovsky, the Soviet economic system was in fact characterized by an all-out advance on its chosen objectives and did not involve intricate coordination. He also argued that quality control was almost entirely lacking: 'we are not dealing with individual defects but with the systematic production of defective products.'<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> For an account of widespread unrest in the camps, see Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* Volume 3, London 1978, pp. 229–86.

<sup>36</sup> The articles outlining this proposal will be found in Leon Trotsky, *Writings* 1930, New York 1975, pp. 123–9, 147.

<sup>37</sup> 'The Five Year Plan in Crisis', *Bulletin of the Opposition*, no. 25/26, 1931. This article was published in an English translation in *Crisis*, no. 13, 1981.



In *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky attacked what he described as Stalin's 'totalitarian' delusions. At around the same time he wrote that Soviet society was not—nor could any society be—structured like a great brain, controlled from some all-knowing centre. He argued this in an article in 1932 in terms worth quoting in full:

If a universal mind existed, of the kind that projected itself into the scientific fancy of Laplace—a mind that could register simultaneously all the processes of nature and society, that could measure the dynamics of their motion, that could forecast the results of their interactions—such a mind, of course, could a priori draw up a faultless and exhaustive economic plan, beginning with the number of acres of wheat down to the last button for a vest. The bureaucracy often imagines that it has such a mind at its disposal; that is why it so easily frees itself from the control of the market and of Soviet democracy. But in reality the bureaucracy errs frightfully in its estimate of its spiritual resources. In its projections it is necessarily obliged, in actual performance, to depend upon the proportions (and with equal justice one may say the disproportions) it has inherited from capitalist Russia, upon the data of the economic structure of contemporary capitalist nations and finally upon the experience of the successes and mistakes of the Soviet economy itself. But even the most correct combination of all these elements will allow only the most imperfect framework of a plan, not more. The innumerable living participants in the economy, collective and individual, must serve notice of their needs and of their relative strength not only through the statistical determinations of plan commissions but by the direct pressure of supply and demand. The plan is checked and, to a considerable degree, realized through the market. The regulation of the market itself must depend upon the tendencies that are brought out through its mechanism. The blueprints produced by the departments must demonstrate their efficacy through commercial calculation. The system of the transitional economy is unthinkable without control by the rouble.<sup>38</sup>

Thus while Trotsky believed that soviet democracy should embrace 'the living regulation by the masses of the structure of the economy', he also insisted that a reborn Soviet democracy would use the market to check on the adequacy and rationality of planning, since, as he explained, 'economic accounting is unthinkable without market relations'.<sup>39</sup>

- 2 Bukharin's advocacy of the use of the market and of the need for a long-term alliance with small producers is well known. But Trotsky had been the first Bolshevik leader to question War Communism;<sup>40</sup> and, as Alec Nove has pointed out, Trotsky and the Left Opposition opposed the delusions of the administrative-command system. As

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<sup>38</sup> Leon Trotsky, 'The Soviet Economy in Danger', *Bulletin of the Opposition*, no. 31, November 1932, available in English in *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1932*, New York 1973, pp. 258–84, the quoted passage being on pp. 273–4. For an interesting discussion of this text, see Alec Nove, *Socialism, Economics and Development*, London 1987, pp. 97–8.

<sup>39</sup> Trotsky, *Writings* 1932, pp. 273, 276

<sup>40</sup> Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, pp. 496–7. Deutscher has a vivid account of a vital incident that prompted Trotsky's rethinking. While drafting an eloquent new decree mobilizing labour, aboard his military train, there is a sudden jolt as the train is thrown into a snow drift. Despite the controls supposedly monitoring rail traffic, and the presence of a nearby village, the chief of the Soviet Military Committee and his party were left for two days to ponder the deficiency of planning and popular motivations.

early as 1922, at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, Trotsky had stated that 'in the course of the transitional epoch each enterprise and each set of enterprises must to a great or lesser extent orient itself independently on the market and test itself through the market. It is necessary for each state-owned factory with its technical director to be subject not only to control from above—by state organs—but also from below through the market, which will remain the regulator of the state economy for a long while to come.'<sup>41</sup>

By 1933, Trotsky was arguing that the role of money and of commodity turnover would grow as the Soviet economy became more advanced: 'The methods of economic and monetary calculation developed under capitalism are not rejected but are socialized', he wrote.<sup>42</sup> It is true that in some fairly remote future, beyond the transitional economy, money and markets would cease to be necessary instruments of social planning, or would be subsumed within some new economic mechanism, but Trotsky gave no intimation of how economic rationality would then work, beyond insisting that it would have to operate at a global level.

The construction of a socialist economy had to be continually oriented to the advancing forces of world economics, hence Trotsky's advocacy of joint planning with social-democratic governments in Central and Western Europe. On the one hand, Trotsky's proposal would allow Soviet development to tap the superior technology of the West; on the other, it would allow Western labour movements to come up with practical and transitional objectives to deal with the problem of mass unemployment.

Although Stalin never adopted Trotsky's proposal, he did promote economic collaboration with the advanced countries in the thirties and in the war years. The cruel and costly 'successes' of the Stalin period derived partly from this fact, partly from the simplification of economic tasks during the early phase of industrialization and war-time, and partly from the sacrifices that the CPSU was still able to demand from its cadres, members and supporters. The need to meet threats of foreign intervention and to realize the promise of a happy future were enough to persuade even such a man as Andrei Sakharov to give of his best and to weep when Stalin died.<sup>43</sup> But the contribution of all these factors diminished over time. The protracted Cold War imposed an increasingly stringent technological blockade and contributed to incipient stagnation. The tasks of economic coordination became more complex as industrialization advanced and the 'socialist camp' grew.<sup>44</sup> Access to Western technology ceased. Cocom

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Nove, *Socialism, Economics and Development*, p. 89, where a helpful discussion will be found of Trotsky's views on these questions

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Nove, *Socialism, Economics and Development*, p. 98

<sup>43</sup> Andrei Sakharov, *Memoirs*, London 1990, p. 164

<sup>44</sup> Stalin's last writings on the continued operation of the law of value in a socialist economy should be read as his own backhanded and partial recognition that planning could not sort out Soviet economic problems. With his love of a phony argument, he declared that one reason for this was that the cooperative farms, unlike the *sovkhozy*, were an independent property form. J. V. Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, Moscow 1952

proved stronger than Comecon. The ideological motivation of the cadres and activists was dimmed by repeated frustrations and disappointments. Cynicism and corruption spread.

The closing up of access to Western technology was thus only one feature of the slowdown in Soviet growth. And furthermore the question has to be asked why the Soviet Union, once a certain threshold had been reached, did not generate its own technology? And why has it so often made bad use even of that technology it has been able to import, such as the advanced computers given to many large Soviet enterprises in the early seventies? In answering these questions, it will be worth briefly considering the basic problem of economic calculation in a planned or collectivist economy.

### The Calculation Debate

The twenties, thirties and forties witnessed a debate on 'socialist calculation' between the leading members of the Austrian school, Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek, and socialist economists, such as Oskar Lange and H.D. Dickinson, which sharply posed the question of the criteria that could govern the allocation of resources to a multiplicity of ends once the market mechanism had been suppressed. In fact Mises claimed in his first contributions in 1920 and 1922 that calculation would be impossible in a planned economy because no *numéraires* would be available to evaluate alternative uses of labour and resources. He believed that calculation in terms of labour time—even if it could be done and some way found of attributing different values to different types of skill—would still not yield rational results because, in default of a market, there would be no way of arriving at the complex pattern of demand for final and intermediate goods. He was similarly unimpressed by Otto Neurath's claim that it would be possible to elaborate an ecological economy based on physical and natural coordinates such as the quantity of coal needed for smelting iron ore. Once again, such a method could not evaluate final demand (in all its complexity) nor arbitrate between rival uses of raw materials and intermediate products (in all *their* complexity).<sup>45</sup>

While Mises's original critique seemed to imply that a planned economy would simply grind to a halt, he later developed the argument that third-rate solutions, or solutions at odds with the proclaimed goals of socialists, could be arrived at. For example, the planners could use prices derived from the capitalist world or the capitalist past in making their calculations. Likewise the existence of money, wages and a restricted market for consumer goods would allow a botched semblance of economic rationality. If the workers were allowed to run the enterprises in which they worked then a species of 'syndicalist capitalism' might develop. Mises also developed the point

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<sup>45</sup> Mises's 1920 essay can be found in Hayek, *Collectivist Economic Planning*, pp. 87–130; most of it was reprinted in Alec Nove and Mario Nuti, *Socialist Economics*, Harmondsworth 1972. Neurath's writings prompted Max Weber to a similar critique around the same time, see Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (1921), New York 1966, pp. 202–18. Weber, and possibly Mises as well, were influenced by the failings of the war economy (see p. 209).

that any planned economy, lacking general criteria, would necessarily foster special interests of a spuriously 'natural' character, such as those based on national or ethnic categories. And, of course, the government could simply usurp the functions of consumers and entrepreneurs only if it was prepared to impose authoritarian solutions. Even elected governments would behave in this way because their programmes would always be an arbitrary abridgement and simplification of social needs, and one which, even supposing it made sense at one moment, would soon be overtaken by the ever-changing flux of circumstance, fortune and taste.

Mises argued that capitalism allowed for a much broader participation in decision-making than that permitted by the cult of nationalization and planning: 'The distinctive mark of socialism is the oneness and indivisibility of the will directing all production activities within the whole social system. When socialists declare that "order" and "organization" are to be substituted for the "anarchy" of production, conscious action for the alleged planlessness of capitalism, true cooperation for competition, production-for-use for production-for-profit, what they have in mind is always the substitution of the exclusive and monopolistic power of only *one* agency for the infinite multitude of the plans of individual consumers and those attending to the wishes to the consumers, the entrepreneurs and capitalists.' Mises rejected the criticism that the market was a social mechanism which acted behind the backs of the agents active within it, while planning expressed conscious social control: 'The truth is that the alternative is not between a dead mechanism or a rigid automatism on one hand and conscious planning on the other hand. The question is whose planning? Should each member of society plan for himself, or should a benevolent government alone plan for them all. The issue is not *autonomism versus conscious action*; it is *autonomous action of each individual versus the exclusive action of the government*.'<sup>46</sup>

Most of the Left chose to ignore this critique, pointing to the palpable evidence of capitalist failure and apparent Soviet success in rehabilitating the Russian economy and embarking on the road to industrialization. However, a few socialist economists did acknowledge that there was a significant case to be answered, and were provoked by Mises's confident ascriptions to insist that he had not considered the best socialist solutions. Mises's original critique had drawn a response from Eduard Heimann, a Social Democrat who had served on Kautsky's Socialization Commission, and both he and the anthropologist Karl Polanyi developed market-socialist models in the twenties.<sup>47</sup> In the thirties further efforts were made to adapt market mechanisms to socialist purposes by the English 'liberal socialist' H.D. Dickinson, by a group of Polish socialists including Oskar Lange, and by A.P. Lerner, who was to make a decisive contribution to welfare economics.

<sup>46</sup> See L. von Mises, *Socialism*, London 1936, especially pp. 113-50. The quoted passages are from L. von Mises, *Human Action*, Chicago 1947, pp. 60-71, 698, based on a work first published in Switzerland in 1943.

<sup>47</sup> See Carl Landauer, *European Socialism* Volume II, Berkeley 1959, pp. 1641-50. See also Roemer and Merdell in K. Polanyi-Levitt, ed., *The Life and Work of Karl Polanyi*, Montréal 1990, pp. 55-77.

The economic models proposed by Heimann and the Polish socialists envisaged a system of workers' councils, each responsible for a given industry; the market was to coordinate relations between these industries, each to be organized on monopolistic lines. The socialist critique of capitalism stressed the wastefulness of competition, so it seemed only natural to propose unified groups in each major industrial branch—footwear, iron and steel, coal, textiles and so forth. In their unsophisticated form these models could not claim to answer all the problems posed by Mises. But Dickinson, Lange and Lerner elaborated complex mathematical models, drawing on neoclassical equilibrium theory, which appeared more capable of withstanding the Austrian assault. Thus Lange responded to Mises's challenge by conceding that planning, even carried out by the most democratic of governments, would lack proper economic criteria. To prevent a relapse into crude and authoritarian solutions, he and Dickinson proposed that socialist planning authorities could develop a simulated market, with a system of shadow prices that would be used to compare different paths of development. Moreover, Lange and Dickinson pointed out that the planners would be able to start from past price schedules and then use trial and error to refine and improve them, this latter process being described as a species of *tâtonnement*. Thus if not enough of a given product was sold then prices would be lowered, and if shortages occurred they would be raised. The profits made by enterprises would also furnish an indicator. The financial authority would use the rate of interest as a regulator and would pay out a social dividend to every individual on a regular basis. While these socialist models embodied new concepts and involved virtuoso displays of mathematical economics, they were institutionally centralist, by comparison with, for example, the account of a socialist economic order earlier elaborated by Oskar Lange and Marek Breit, which had allowed a greater margin of autonomy both to working collectives and to individual workers.<sup>48</sup> Abba Lerner himself noted that models of this sort were too static, and that, in a dynamic world, Lange had become 'dazzled by the picture of equilibrium'.<sup>49</sup>

Hayek took it upon himself to respond to these new socialist models

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<sup>48</sup> H.D. Dickinson published an essay outlining his model in the *Economic Journal*, June 1933. The Lange/Breit model was published in 1935 in the *Zeitschrift für Nationalökonomie*, and is discussed in A. Chioasi, 'The Right to Employment Principle and Self-Managed Market Socialism', *EUI*, Florence 1986. Lange's more formalized essay, 'On the Economic Theory of Socialism', appeared in two parts in the *Review of Economic Studies*, vol. IV, nos 1 and 2, 1936–37. It was later reprinted in book form, and a shortened version appears in Nove and Nuti, *Socialist Economies*. In an appendix to the second part of his essay, Lange reviewed Marxist writing on the economics of socialism, favourably citing Kautsky's work and quoting extensively from Trotsky's essay of 1932, 'The Soviet Economy in Danger'; this latter reference he undoubtedly took over from an earlier essay by Lerner, 'Economic Theory and Socialist Economy', *Review of Economic Studies*, vol. II, no. 1, 1934, which had criticized Dobb's ideas. The best recent discussion of the 'calculation debate', with many helpful references, is Don Lavoie, *Rivalry and Central Planning*, Cambridge 1985. However, Lavoie does not fully acknowledge the extent to which Lerner anticipated key points to be made by the Austrians. For a critique of Austrian assumptions, see G. Hodgson, *Economics and Institutions*, Cambridge 1988.

<sup>49</sup> A.P. Lerner, 'A Note on Socialist Economy', *Review of Economic Studies*, vol. IV, no. 2, 1936–37, pp. 72–6. Lerner was himself one of three editors of this journal, together with Paul Sweezy and Ursula Hicks.

and to further develop the Austrian critique. In essays published in 1940 and 1945, he argued that Lange and Dickinson had failed to register the indispensable role of entrepreneurship in seizing opportunities and 'creating' price relationships that were not simply given. Their notion of a socialist central bank advancing funds to enterprises failed to register that the banking authorities would lack specifically economic guidelines for backing one project rather than another; enterprises bidding for funds could promise unrealistic returns with no fear of the consequences. One of Hayek's refrains was that collectivist ownership would erase responsibility for investment decisions by distributing them indistinctly between the central authority and the enterprise managers. 'It will rest with the central authority to decide whether one plant located at one place should expand rather than another plant situated elsewhere. All this involves planning by the central authority on much the same scale as if it were actually running the enterprise. And while the individual entrepreneur would in all probability be given some definite contractual tenure for managing the plant entrusted to him, all new investments will be necessarily centrally directed. This division would then have the result that neither the entrepreneur nor the central authority would be in a position to plan, and that it would be impossible to assess the responsibility for mistakes. To assume it is possible to create conditions of full competition without making those responsible for the decisions pay for their mistakes seems to be pure illusion.'<sup>30</sup>

With his essay on 'The Uses of Knowledge in Society', published in *The American Economic Review* (1945), Hayek drew attention to the inescapably fragmented and dispersed character of economic knowledge. The real economic potential of a resource or commodity depended on exactly where and when it was available. While a multitude of entrepreneurs might be able to spot new possibilities and relationships, and back their hunches at their own cost, the planners simply could not know this mass of dispersed and discrete information, much of it strictly unintelligible or meaningless outside its given context.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hayek's first essay took the form of a review of the book version of Lange's essay and of Dickinson's book, *The Economics of Socialism*. F. A. von Hayek, 'Socialist Calculation: the Competitive Solution', *Economics*, 1940, p. 145. Mises had argued like this in the 1920s, responding to the 'market socialist' theories of Karl Polanyi and Eduard Heimann; see Don Lavoie, *Rivalry and Central Planning*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 174-6.

<sup>31</sup> At this point Hayek may have been influenced by the work of his teacher Böhm-Bawerk, who had written, in the context of discussing which types of knowledge were operative in capitalism, 'in the region of economics where we have to deal so largely with conscious and calculating human action, the first of the two sources of knowledge, the objective source, can at best be considered a very poor and, especially when standing alone, an altogether inadequate part of the total attainable knowledge'. *Karl Marx and the Crisis of His System*, p. 115. But Böhm-Bawerk immediately goes on to concede that the knowledge and motives of economic actors do play a part in Marx's system (p. 116). Indeed among several affinities between the Marxist and Austrian schools is a tendency to distrust overgeneralized or reified aggregates, where socio-economic relations are represented by strings of mathematical equations. While Marx did write an algebra of exploitation, he also argued that capitalism and the market brought about a reduction of quality to quantity, an idea which can illuminate the double-sided character of the processes of entrepreneurial appropriation. With regard

If Hayek's critique of Lange and Dickinson succeeded in sowing real doubts as to the effectiveness of a make-believe, simulated market, it also reinforced the case against full-blooded planning developed by Mises. Thus Hayek answers the argument that so long as consumers' preferences are established then this will imply the need for the appropriate producers' goods, with these observations: 'It is evident, however, that the values of the factors of production do not depend solely on the valuation of the consumers' goods, but also on the conditions of supply of the various factors of production. Only to a mind to which all these facts were simultaneously known would the answers necessarily follow from the facts given to it. The practical problem, however, arises precisely because these facts are never so given to a single mind, and because, in consequence, it is necessary that in the solution of the problem knowledge should be used that is dispersed among many people.'<sup>32</sup> Hayek's argument significantly parallels some of the points quoted above from Trotsky. Both authors point to the fallacy of a single mind directing an economy; indeed, in this same article, Hayek himself quotes from Trotsky's 1932 essay on 'The Dangers Facing the Soviet Economy'.<sup>33</sup>

### Unanswered Questions

The 'calculation debate' petered out in the forties without achieving resolution. The critical points made by each side were, perhaps, stronger than their arguments for the economic systems they themselves favoured. Many issues were left hanging, although this was not acknowledged at the time. From a non-Marxist perspective sympathetic to planning, Joseph Schumpeter argued in his influential work

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<sup>32</sup> (*cont.*)

to Hayek's argument from knowledge, note also that Abba Lerner had produced a more weakly formulated version of this point in 1935: 'Where there are thousands of factors, being combined in thousands of different ways in millions of different productive units, and where a re-shuffling of factors may have to be of the most complicated kind, it seems to be that it would not be easy to find a technical expert who knows all that is going on everywhere.' A.P. Lerner, 'A Rejoinder to Mr Dobb', *Review of Economic Studies*, 1935, p. 153.

<sup>33</sup> F.A. von Hayek, 'The Uses of Knowledge in Society', *American Economic Review*, September 1945, p. 530. Hayek's various contributions to the 'calculation debate' between 1935 and 1945 were republished in *Individualism and Economic Order*, London 1948.

<sup>34</sup> Hayek, 'The Uses of Knowledge in Society', p. 529. Hayek will have read of this article in Lange's appendix, which cited both the passage referred to here and the lengthy quotation I have myself given above (p. 29). Trotsky's stature as one of the key leaders of the Russian Revolution undoubtedly lent piquancy to his qualified espousal of market mechanisms. But his way of conceptualizing the problem of the command economy made its own intellectual contribution and might have been cited even if he had not been the founder of the Red Army. This raises the question of how and why he arrived at his ideas on this issue. It is not impossible that he had read Friedrich von Wieser whose work prepares the ground for the single-mind argument. His prominence in the Soviet government in the War Communism period will, as Deutscher emphasizes, have given him first-hand experience. To this we may add that Soviet intellectual life in the twenties also witnessed a fascinating concern with complex structure and the 'dialogic'—as in Voloshinov/Bakhtin. Finally Trotsky's own revulsion from totalitarian projects and his (somewhat belated) vindication of political pluralism will also have assisted his capacity to pierce to the roots of the economic problem.

*Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1943) that Hayek and Mises had failed to sustain their case. Hayek's 1945 essay was as much directed at Schumpeter as at the Marxists. The socialist side of the debate did argue that a capitalist market would reflect the unequal and irrational structure of economic power. Dobb warned that recourse to an uncontrolled market could lead to mass unemployment. He pointed out that the broad planning of economic development meant that large-scale projects could be undertaken which would never have seemed justified according to the atomized calculation of market actors. While Dobb did not engage with Hayek's argument concerning planners' ignorance, the latter's account of entrepreneurial knowledge shows that he had developed his own position through his encounter with the socialist economists.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, neither Mises nor Hayek addressed themselves to the syndicalist market socialism originally put forward by Lange and Breit, understandably, since it had been abandoned by Lange himself (Breit died in the war). The syndicalist strain within socialism was particularly weak in the forties, and belief in the big battalions particularly strong. So far as I am aware no-one pointed out that Hayek's argument from the dispersed nature of knowledge could also be deployed against a narrow capitalist entrepreneurialism by advocates of social and worker self-management. Of course, the argument from dispersed knowledge would not justify an indiscriminate and incoherent populism, since the development of democratic expressions of intersubjectivity is as difficult as it is vital to achieve in a world in which the structures of social life are more thoroughly collective and interwoven than ever before.

Though respect for individual choice must be the starting point for politics and economics, many facilities, in a modern economy, are inescapably collective in character. That collective decisions can never match the apparent lucidity and self-sufficiency of the choice of an individual is a source of inescapable complexity. But this does not require us to outlaw the hope that better collective arrangements could furnish all with a greater real possibility of self-determination. Socialists are committed to the view that a range of consciously concerted measures are either desirable or unavoidable, and that everyone should have broadly the same claim on society's material resources. The Austrians rejected equality on the grounds that there was literally no way of measuring the wishes of one individual against those of another. They rejected all interventions in the system of free (capitalist) exchange, or 'catallaxy', other than those designed simply to guarantee and protect the 'spontaneous order' brought about by the clash of individual wills and dispositions. The mildest reformism was as unjustified as the most sweeping revolutionism. While they reasonably denied that society could be made to function with the

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<sup>24</sup> See Maurice Dobb, *Political Economy and Capitalism*, London 1937, pp. 275–310; and also his essay in Nove and Nutt, *Socialist Economics*. That Hayek developed new ideas in the debate with the socialists is argued by Israel Kirzner in Ellen Paul et al., eds., *Capitalism*, New York 1990. Dobb reviewed Hayek's *Collectivist Economic Planning in The Economic Journal* in 1935 but did not respond directly to his later essays



synoptic logic of a single mind, they unreasonably contended that there is no area of economic life where collective decisions could be validly made outside the market itself. Simple-minded socialism, or a socialism adapted to simple conditions, has imagined that the logic of social choice can be just as intelligible and definitive as an individual's decision to slake their thirst by drinking a glass of water. However, without at all abandoning socialism it is quite possible to recognize that social need and public good have to be arrived at by complex, tentative and negotiated ways—indeed this could be seen as the very essence of genuine socialism. Without abandoning the ideal and touchstone of individual self-determination, or falsely projecting it onto the collective, socialists have contended that (1) a broad equality of material conditions will be most conducive to generalized self-determination; (2) the intimate structures of individuality are constructed out of a social fabric which should consequently be as rich as possible; (3) there are common conditions of human existence that require collective attention and sustenance; (4) a variety of processes of democratic self-determination are required to achieve such outcomes. Production, consumption and, of course, communication, all rest on social presuppositions. Socialism postulates the necessity of developing forms of social life which will allow for conscious human control of economic processes, with the aim of banishing want, furnishing every individual with the material means for self-realization, preventing class division and ensuring a sustainable relationship with the natural environment. What is implied is not a single mind but institutions that will encourage a meeting of minds. The Austrian position denies equality, restricts the social dimension of individuality, argues that the common conditions faced by humanity can take care of themselves, and minimizes the scope for collective deliberation and determination.

A number of such points were made by the socialists who contributed to the 'calculation debate'. Polanyi argued that the market did not protect the lifeworld that made it possible; Dickinson itemized market failures; and Lerner identified criteria for public welfare and social cost. Otto Neurath also developed arguments that were never really addressed by Mises or Hayek, perhaps because Neurath was a philosopher rather than economist. He had observed that the market reflected the interests and needs of those now living but not that of future generations; economic resources would thus tend to be exploited in a short-sighted and unrenewable way. Neurath also stressed that it was not the job of economists to pre-empt democratic debate; they should therefore produce rival scenarios of possible futures. Neurath argued that neither a market nor a *numéraire* were appropriate in assessing social needs and public goods, many of which were intuitive and indivisible. He argued that just as generals do not deal in 'war units', so governments should not aim at achieving or maximizing 'instruction units' or 'health units', but should rather aim to furnish whatever resources are needed to ensure a healthy population educated to whatever level the citizens found desirable. Thus Neurath did argue that society could develop a 'common mind', in the sense of a majority view, on the desirable provision of welfare and public goods; doctors and clinics would not need a market to inform themselves of

the ailments of their patients.<sup>55</sup> In the further elaboration of the Austrian position it is notable both that it has remained vulnerable to arguments from ecology and is consistently minimalist in its view of public goods. Moreover, Hayek has been drawn to advocate a drastic narrowing of the scope of democratic government.<sup>56</sup> However, although Neurath posed questions which the Austrians never satisfactorily answered, his own belief that it was possible entirely to suppress the market was quite wrong-headed, for some of the reasons indicated by Mises. Dickinson and Lerner did not espouse this fantasy and argued for the adaptation of the market for socialist purposes. But for their part, the market socialists did not establish that they had put forward a fully workable model, rather than particular mechanisms and concepts that could be used to modify the workings of either a market or a planned economy. In particular they did not respond to the Hayek/Mises arguments of the forties, with their vindication of entrepreneurship, risk-taking, innovation, and the need to make economic agents responsible in the use of resources.

The Austrian critique could only really have been met by a case for socialist self-management and public enterprise that based itself on the dispersed character of economic knowledge and refused the tempting delusion of totally planned outcomes. At the time the arguments of the Austrians could be more easily ignored, since they were rejected *en bloc* by mainstream neoclassical and Keynesian economists as much as by socialists. Hayek's specific policy recommendations in the early thirties had been disastrously wrong.<sup>57</sup> By the mid forties Hayek was arguing that the problems of the thirties should not be blamed on capitalism but on inept government intervention and regulation. Today's socialists can take some comfort from Hayek's defiant belief that genuinely liberal capitalism did not yet exist, and therefore had not failed, since this is what we would say about genuine

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<sup>55</sup> See the interesting discussion of Neurath by Juan Martinez-Alier in *Capitalism, Nature and Society*, no. 2, Summer 1989. Neurath had been economic adviser to the Munich Soviet, and later a prominent member of the Vienna Circle of Logic Positivists, and later, analytical philosophers. See also the discussion of Neurath in Martinez-Alier's *Ecological Economics*, Oxford 1989, and in Landauer, *European Socialism* Volume II, pp. 163–69. The ideas of Polanyi and Neurath, with their refusal of the reductionism of the market, had some influence on the Frankfurt School via the work of Weil and Pollock.

<sup>56</sup> For Hayek's discomfort with ecological arguments, and attempt to argue away 'neighbourhood effects', see *The Constitution of Liberty*, Chicago 1960, pp. 367–75. The very term 'neighbourhood effects' has an unduly localized and cosy ring to it. Hayek's later writings, such as those in the series *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, propose stringent limitations on who should be allowed to vote, and how often, as well as narrowly circumscribed powers for the government of the day—all this in the interest of protecting the 'spontaneous order' of the catallaxy from the short-sighted passions of the citizenry. For a discussion of this, see Nick Bomanquet, *After the New Right*, London 1983, pp. 26–42. We socialists should, however, be gentle in our critiques of the Austrian notion of a catallaxy, since it is so obviously first cousin to the notion of 'freely associated producers' in a world where the state has withered away.

<sup>57</sup> See F.A. von Hayek, *Prices and Production*, London 1931, with its attack on 'the well-meaning but dangerous proposals to fight depression with "a little inflation"' (p. 125). Though note that one of the most prominent left thinkers of the time, John Scrachey, shared Hayek's view that Keynesianism would generate uncontrollable inflation; see John Scrachey, *The Coming Struggle for Power*, London 1934, where Hayek's critique of Keynes is at least partially endorsed.

socialism. The socialist can also be encouraged by Hayek's view that human nature, formed in millennia of primitive collectivism, is predisposed towards socialist thinking.<sup>58</sup>

### Postwar Settlements and Socialist Economics

On the other hand, the ideas of Dickinson, Lange and Lerner played a part in the elaboration of British wartime and postwar economic and welfare policy, where they seemed popular and effective. Lord Beveridge and Evan Durbin drew directly on this work, while Abba Lerner's *The Economics of Control* (1944) was to become a classic text in the field of welfare economics. The 'market socialism' of this period, with its important concepts of social cost and equity, could be absorbed in a reformist and technocratic mode. Dickinson envisioned a non-capitalist society, but his model did not incorporate any element of worker representation within the productive enterprise. Both Lange and Dickinson were concerned to show that a socialist economy was compatible with, indeed necessary to, the functioning of political democracy, the safeguarding of individual liberties, and the satisfaction of consumer needs. They were influenced by Lerner's critique of Dobb, notably Dobb's espousal of an authoritarian model and preparedness to discount consumer wishes in favour of supposedly far-sighted planning authorities.

Neither Dickinson nor Lange celebrated consumerism. Indeed Dickinson veered in the opposite direction, as in the following recommendation, which also illustrates his technocratic bent: "The powerful engine of propaganda and advertisement, employed by public organs of education and enlightenment instead of by the hucksters and panders of private profit-making industry, could divert demand into socially desirable directions while preserving the subjective impression of free choice. If the meretricious but effective arts of the salesman and the publicity expert were placed at the disposal of impartial and disinterested bodies of experts—dietitians, architects, heating engineers, textile specialists, orthopaedists, psychologists—what an improvement in the standard of food, houses, clothes, footwear, and toys would result!"<sup>59</sup>

This cheerful paternalism was soon to be amplified on a national scale by Britain's wartime Ministries of Food, Information and Aircraft Production. The British economy was soon more collectivized than that of Nazi Germany, where private car production was to continue until as late as 1944. In Britain the Ministry of Food suppressed branded goods in several fields and supplied consumers with their due

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<sup>58</sup> See Hayek's speech to the Montpelerin society, reprinted in *Individualism and Economic Order*, and his later *Knowledge, Evolution and Society*, London 1985.

<sup>59</sup> H.D. Dickinson, *The Economics of Socialism*, London 1939, p. 32. As well as devoting critical attention to consumption, this book argues that socialism should advance equality for women. The respectful tone of Hayek's critique was a tribute both to its quality and to the influence of Wiesner on Dickinson's thought; for the latter see H.D. Dickinson's review of Ernest Mandel's *Treatise on Marxist Economics* in *NLR* 21, October 1963. At this time Dickinson formed part of an academic support group for Tony Benn.

ration of a standard, medically approved diet, sharply reducing the incidence of rickets and other signs of malnutrition. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (1944) was written against this background. While the social reforms embarked on in these years certainly did possess unappealingly statist features, they did not turn out to have the dire implications of which Hayek warned in this highly charged polemic.<sup>60</sup>

The left economics of this period was prone to be much impressed by the power of big business as well as big government. The Austrian faith in the market seemed blind to the ways in which monopoly and oligopoly distorted, and dictated to, the market. The new market-sensitive left economists no longer held up the supposed economic rationality of cartels and trusts as a model for socialism, but they tended to exaggerate the power and durability of monopoly forms. A more satisfactory account of the dynamics of capitalist competition could, it is true, be found in Schumpeter's notion of the gale of 'creative destruction' that was entailed by capitalist social relations. But the notion of 'state monopoly capital' was propagandistically more congenial, and perhaps made 'state monopoly socialism' seem more acceptable. In war-devastated Eastern Europe the tasks of reconstruction did indeed probably require large-scale state initiative. As the Cold War closed in and Stalinism asserted itself in Poland, Oskar Lange himself abandoned his schematic dream of a democratic market socialism.

However, the notion of a dispersed social initiative and of the potential of the direct producers did not entirely disappear from Marxist writing—but now it cropped up in debates about the past. Thus Maurice Dobb in *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1946) and in the subsequent 'transition debate' drew on Marx's work to illuminate the ways in which productive organization from below, working through the mechanism of competition not mercantile monopoly, had been the really revolutionary path to industrial capitalism. Though Dobb insisted on the early successes of Soviet planning, he was later to note that such planning had been quite narrowly focused in the thirties and was to face quite different problems in the aftermath of postwar reconstruction. He pointed out that the Second Five Year Plan had only mentioned about 300 specific products, while that of 1960 had to deal with 15,000 different products, produced by 200,000 enterprises, with all the signs suggesting that complexity was growing at an exponential rate.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For the involvement of Dickinson, Lerner and other 'market socialists' on Labour thinking, see Elizabeth Durbin, *New Jerusalem: the Labour Party and the Economics of Democratic Socialism*, London 1985, pp. 169–71, 232–41. It is worth noting that the reformism of this epoch at least produced real reforms, such as the National Health Service. Another peripheral contributor to the 'calculation debate', A.C. Pigou, came closest to anticipating the 1945 Labour government's approach to nationalization, in his *Socialism versus Capitalism*, London 1937.

<sup>61</sup> Maurice Dobb, *Soviet Economic Planning since 1917*, London 1966, p. 373. On the basis of simple correlation, it could be argued that as the ability of Gosplan increased, with the elaboration of more sophisticated control techniques and the application of computers, so Soviet economic growth rates dropped. By the seventies, data on millions of products were being fed into the central computers, and thousands of millions of bits of paper were being shuffled between the ministries and the enterprises. Yet all along,

The critics of Stalinist economics had been almost too devastating in their arguments. If rationality was so totally lacking, if quality and coordination was so bad, how did the population of the Soviet Union actually get fed, and how was it that Soviet output grew so rapidly? The Austrians and the Left Oppositionists could argue in their different ways that totalitarian political methods could be used to mobilize society for a few simple objectives. And they could also call in question the validity of Soviet statistics, as Rakovsky and Trotsky certainly did by pointing to the problem of quality and appropriateness, and stressing the terrible cost of Soviet advances. Writing in this tradition, David Rousset published in 1949 one of the first studies of the large-scale use of forced labour in the Soviet Union. But the Soviet Union of Khrushchev's day, with its Sputnik and official de-Stalinization, seemed both economically more successful and headed towards a more humane order. By the late fifties even Hayek seemed to qualify slightly, but not abandon, his argument: 'The conspicuous successes which the Russians have achieved in certain fields and which are the causes of renewed interest in the deliberate organization of scientific effort should not have surprised us and should give us no reason for altering our opinion about the importance of freedom. That any one goal, or any limited number of objectives, which are already known to be achievable, are likely to be reached sooner if they are given priority in a central allocation of all resources cannot be disputed.'<sup>62</sup>

Despite the acuteness of the theoretical critique developed by Mises and Hayek, they did not follow it up by empirical investigations of the workings of the Soviet economy; nor did they extend it to consider other socialist economic models, beyond planning and the simulated market. In the sixties and seventies, leading economists in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Cuba conducted their own debate on the best way to improve the functioning of their economic systems. While important issues were certainly at stake in these debates, the prevailing single-party-state model furnished a restricting context, and the argument itself was settled by party diktat, or even tanks.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> (cont.)

Soviet successes, such as they were, may have owed more to the motivation of the cadres in the factories. This was the characteristic emphasis of the Polish Marxist economists, which is why W. Brus courageously reminded his readers of Rosa Luxemburg's verdict on the Russian Revolution in his book, *The Market in a Socialist Economy*, London 1972. Dobb wrote an introduction to this English edition, where he drew attention to this latter point and expressed support for a variety of market socialism. M. Kalecki wrote in 1942 as follows: 'No socialist government can hope to succeed unless its efforts are seconded by a feeling of heightened tempo of development permeating the whole of society and, above all, of self-confidence amongst the workers and lower strata of society. Such a mood cannot be artificially created—it can be stimulated by propaganda but only if a real basis for it exists.' Quoted in J. Onatynski, *Michał Kalecki*, London 1988, p. 184. Of course a mixture of illusion, terror and propaganda, combined with fear of German invasion, could for a time effectively mobilize the cadres and 'little cogs', but Kalecki was right to suppose that mobilization of this type could not be sustained for more than a decade or two. Kalecki himself proposed not only greater worker participation but also perspective plans that would give priority to investment in consumption goods and industries.

<sup>63</sup> Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, p. 392.

<sup>64</sup> For an assessment of these debates pinpointing the failure to establish a rational pricing system, see Charles Bettelheim, *The Transition to Socialist Economy*, Brighton 1975, pp. 184–243.

The researches and theoretical arguments of Alec Nove have furnished a new twist to the debate about socialist economics in the seventies and eighties. While he drew copiously on the experience and debates of the Communist world, he was in a better position to integrate the political moment—favouring democracy without seeing it as, by itself, the solution to all or most economic problems of socialism. Nove accepted the relative efficiency of market mechanisms in allocating routine investment, but disputed their distributional and ecological logic in a world of scarcity. He rejected the view that markets could only work on the basis of private property. In his empirical work Nove gave many examples both of the absence of an effective measure of economic performance in the Soviet planning system and of the now multi-million complexity of basic decisions that had to be taken simply to keep the economy going.<sup>64</sup> Had the Prague Spring been allowed to flourish, this sort of thinking would have developed openly in the East itself, but instead debate on rival models of socialism was suppressed.

### The Lessons of Soviet Stagnation

In the seventies and eighties, capitalism, despite its own problems and injustices, proved itself productively superior to the Soviet-type economies. What were the specific brakes and blockages developed by these economies? What bearing do they have on any project for a socialist economy?

The ferocious negation of socialist democracy must certainly count as one factor that inhibited innovation and the creative development of working collectives, especially in the era of information technology. At best Stalinism inhibited that free interchange between skilled workers and scientific investigators which so often characterizes the frontiers of technical development; while at worst it led to the terroristic imposition of the technical fantasies of pseudo-scientists like Lysenko. But this argument by itself does not explain the full measure of Soviet stagnation, since states such as South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore have derived productivity advantages from new technology while operating systematic censorship, suppressing political dissidents, and so forth. Rapid economic development in Southeast Asia

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<sup>64</sup> Nove was, of course, far from alone in advocating market socialism, and freely drew on the important work of East European economists such as Sik, Kornai and Brus. However, for the reasons given above, Nove's work has had a critical role in discussion of socialist economics in the English-speaking world. See *The Soviet Economic System*, London 1977; 'Market Socialism and its Critics', *Soviet Studies*, vol. XXIV, no. 1, 1972, 'Problems and Prospects of the Soviet Economy', *NLR* 119, January–February 1980; *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, London 1983. For the reappearance of some themes from the 'calculation debate', see Milton Friedman, *Plan and Market*, with a reply by Alec Nove, Committee for the Study of Communist Economics, London 1984. For one strand of the debate on Nove, see W. Brus, 'Socialism—Feasible and Viable?' *NLR* 153, September–October 1985; Ernest Mandel, 'In Defence of Socialist Planning', *NLR* 159, September–October 1986; Alec Nove, 'Markets and Socialism', *NLR* 161, January–February 1987; Ernest Mandel, 'The Myth of Market Socialism', *NLR* 169, May–June 1988; Meghnad Desai et al., 'The Transition from Actually Existing Capitalism', *NLR* 170, July–August 1988, Diane Elson, 'Market Socialism or Socialization of the Market', *NLR* 172, November–December 1988.

has thrown up social forces which demand greater democracy. Relative prosperity allows the rulers to extend some democratic concessions. The economic failings of the Soviet-type economies, by contrast, have created most unpropitious conditions for political reform and democratization.

The critical failing of Soviet-type economies would appear to be the crudity of the links between micro-decisions and macro-decisions. Or, to put the same point a different way, the absence of a well-calibrated system for determining socially necessary labour time. (However, note that, in the nature of things, the social necessity of labour expended in production is only validated *post factum*, in the act whereby consumers confirm through their purchases that the product in question really did meet a socially effective need. And because technique changes, the notion of socially necessary labour time is neither fixed nor pre-ordained, which is why the problems faced by planners are not algorithmic.)

Soviet-type economies are most able to meet 'consumer' need in those sectors where there is a single large customer able to place specific orders and reject the product if it is not of acceptable quality. Thus Soviet arms production often achieves global competitiveness, because the Soviet arms procurement ministries monitor the production process and have the power to reject sub-standard equipment. The ordinary Soviet consumer is not in that position, as we know, and has no effective institutional representation. Gorbachev's attempts to remedy this deficiency in the late eighties by enforcing effective quality control (*gospriemka*) ran aground, encountering opposition from both workers and managers.<sup>65</sup>

The problem, however, relates as much to the minimization of costs for a certain output as to the satisfaction of demand. Even Soviet military production, or the successes of the industrialization drive, have been achieved at excessive cost. Where there were only a few basic inputs and little possibility of substitution then the problems of planning and calculation were at least manageable. With traditional heavy industry the number of inputs were relatively few and the main variable was simple human effort.<sup>66</sup>

In Soviet-type economies the enterprises do not confront many problems which demand fine calculations of alternatives. Soviet

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<sup>65</sup> See Anders Ashund, *Gorbachev's Struggle for Economic Reform*, London 1989, pp. 76–87.

<sup>66</sup> In the 1960s I worked for the Cuban Ministry of Soviet Trade. The section chief told a story about an economic conference convened by the then-President, Oswaldo Dorticos, who had general oversight in the economic field at the time. One of the economic advisers argued that in drawing up such and such a plan for a given sector the aim must be to produce the maximum output for the minimum effort and expense. Dorticos emphatically disagreed. 'This is not the revolutionary way,' he insisted, 'instead we aim to achieve the maximum of output with the maximum forces (*fuerzas*).' Unfortunately the attitude expressed by Dorticos, the cavalry-charge method of economic mobilization, was to become all too typical of Cuban economic management, as in the attempted Ten Million Ton Harvest of 1970.

enterprises have found no use for computers, because they exist in an economic climate where they face either too much or too little regularity. In principle they have been told exactly what to produce and what their inputs would be. In practice shortages will occur and informal contacts will have to be used to remedy the gap. The skills required are not those of a rational entrepreneur, acting as the bearer of an economic logic, but rather those of a fixer. Those running different enterprises trade favours, weaving a complex web of mutual personal obligations. Because the enterprise managers are eager to be allotted an easy plan target they will not give the centre a true picture of costs and capacity—the result is a ‘slack’ rather than ‘taut’ plan. There is no scope for finding the cheapest supplier, nor for monitoring the response of the consumer, since both are given in the plan. Neither the enterprise nor the planning authority can make those comparative and marginal cost calculations, and those estimates of demand elasticities, that are yielded by market competition. Let us take the question of by-products as an example. A Western manager will not be averse to finding a profitable sale for the by-products of an enterprise; the Soviet manager works for one ministry and is unlikely to discover that his industrial waste could be a vital input for another branch. For its part the ministry is also likely to give priority to its sectional interest. This fact, compounded by negligent social control and the fetishism of *val* (value-added)—without any proof that what has been added is indeed of social value—is one factor contributing to the poor ecological record of the Soviet-type economies. Such considerations help to explain why the so-called ‘waste products’ emitted by the Siberian oil industry poison the atmosphere and soil rather than serve as the basis for a plastics industry.

The Soviet experience with management computers revealed the crudity of the calculations required by the administrative-command system. In the event the powerful computers, on which so many scarce resources were lavished, were never used by Soviet management for anything except calculating the wage packets of the enterprises’ employees. If a Soviet manager has surplus resources these will be invested in such a way as to promote the self-sufficiency of the enterprise, building ever larger buffer stocks, opening component factories, and catering to the needs of a precious work force. Thus a large Soviet combine will not only make the most of its components; it will also run farms, cattle ranches and brick-making kilns so that it can directly meet the needs of its work force without recourse to an unreliable and ineffective market. This method of organization has a certain weird economic logic of its own, but it is not conducive to, or regulated by, a wider rationality. Formally more socialized than capitalist production, it is in practice much less so.<sup>67</sup>

The Soviet enterprise is either ‘under orders’ or ‘on its own’. In the first case, the effective socialization of management is limited by

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<sup>67</sup> On the failure of Soviet management to make effective use of computers, see Mark R. Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power*, London 1988, pp. 246–60.



the planners' inability to know or control any large, complex economy; while in the latter, plant autonomism is unabashed. By contrast, the elementary mechanisms of market competition compare the use of resources made by one enterprise with the use made of similar resources by others. Capitalist entrepreneurs and managers do not know their competitors' costs with any exactness, but they do know what they are selling at what price, and can usually make an informed guess about changing techniques and sources of supply.

Until very recently most Soviet planning was conducted in physical terms. This could and did result in manifest absurdities, with enterprises producing unnecessarily heavy equipment since their targets were specified in tons. Transport organizations, similarly, would find their efforts measured by ton-miles, giving them no incentive to ensure the shortest journey. Authors are paid by the length, not sales, of their books. No rational pricing system exists. Of course products have prices, but the latter have an inert character, not altering however much or little of the good was produced, and not bearing any clear relationship either to productivity or to the prices of other goods. As a consequence market gardeners in the Caucasus could find that it made sense to fly to Moscow with their produce (because air travel is cheap relative to fresh produce), or collective farmers could find that it made sense to feed their pigs with subsidized bread.<sup>68</sup>

### Market Signals and Forces of Production

Rejecting or denying market prices, and lacking any rationale for departing from market price, the Soviet-type economies have tended to form stagnant pools cut off from the mainstream of world economy. In the fifties this was not so clear because of the exceptional nature of the postwar reconstruction. But it was to be pointed out in a lucid, indeed prescient, way by Che Guevara in February 1964:

The starting point is to calculate the socially necessary labour required to produce a given article, but what has been overlooked is the fact that socially necessary labour is an economic and historical concept. Therefore, it changes not only on the local (or national) level but in world terms as well. Continued technological advances, a result of competition in the capitalist world, reduces the expenditure of necessary labour and therefore lowers the value of the product. A closed society can ignore such changes for a certain time, but it would always have to come back to these international relations in order to compare product values. If a given society ignores such changes for a long time without developing new and accurate formulas to replace old ones, it will create internal interrelationships that will shape its own value structure in a way that may be internally consistent but would be in contradiction with the tendencies of more highly developed technology (for example in steel and plastics). This could result in relative reverses of some importance, and, in any case, would produce

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<sup>68</sup> For an exhaustive account of the irrationalities of the 'traditional' Soviet model, see Ellman, *The Socialist Economy*, pp. 17-52.

distortions in the law of value on an international scale, making it impossible to compare economies.<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly, Guevara here assumes that economic planning should make use of the 'law of value', itself an expression of market relations, and that there can be a succession of partially segmented markets. This suggests the need for an acceptance of complexity if economic regulation is to be effective, and a willingness to check results against what is happening elsewhere.

### Measures of Efficiency

In *Capital* and in other works, Marx gives a marvelously intricate account of the operations of the law of value under capitalism. But he at once makes it clear that the juggernaut of capital accumulation simplifies the problems it sets itself, by ignoring certain human and ecological costs which achieve no representation upon the capitalist market. One would have thought that the workings of a socialist economy would inescapably be *just as complex* as those of capitalism. Yet, puzzlingly, socialist economists have often been so preoccupied with making propaganda for the cause that they have barely paused to acknowledge or investigate the fact, instead falling back on the simplification thesis discussed earlier. Of course the unavoidable complexity of the modern economy need not involve obscurity if a variety of mechanisms are found for allowing decisions to be made in the light of relevant information, by those best placed to make them, and under the influence of democratically determined and effective social norms.

Does Marx encourage a blindness to the role of the market in transmitting information, and does socialism necessarily inhibit the initiative of many economic actors? It is sometimes thought that for Marx market relations are seen as mere surface phenomena concealing the workings of the real mode of production and relations of appropriation. Yet, in his own account, competition between different capitals shapes and structures the processes of production and distribution at the most fundamental level. Marx's argument that the 'specific labour' of the worker is governed by socially necessary 'abstract labour' refers us directly to the workings of competition and the market. Similarly Marx's argument could be extended to show that each specific concentration of capital has to justify itself in terms of the norms of 'abstract capital'. Indeed it is difficult to deny that in Marxist terms the market must be seen as an aspect of the forces of

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<sup>69</sup> 'Planning and Consciousness in the Transition to Socialism (On the Budgetary Finance System)', *Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution: Writings and Speeches of Che Guevara*, edited by David Deutschmann, Sydney 1987, pp. 203–30, pp. 220–21. Guevara, of course, remained an advocate of planning, but he did clearly face up to the consequent problems. The argument quoted shows that the absolute levels of world market prices can only be ignored at peril. But because of the segmentation of markets, and because it is comparative prices not absolute prices that are the operative factor, a development strategy could work by deliberately 'getting prices wrong'. See, for example, Alice Amaden's account of South Korean practice, 'Third World Industrialization. Global Fordism or a New Model?', *NLA* 182, July–August 1990, pp. 5–31.

production rather than as simply an epiphenomenon of the relations of production.<sup>70</sup>

Marx's insight into the complexity and dynamism of capitalism should presumably infuse our understanding of what planning and socialization might mean. It should be a conception that builds upon, and gives a new direction to, the forms of economic coordination achieved by, for example, the multinationals, the banks, the credit-card agencies, and bodies like the EC. Some may contest the notion that a socialist economics should seek to emulate the sort of efficiency promoted by market competition. In a socialist pattern of economy the overall distribution of demand would be very different from that in a capitalist society, and so would be the context and capacity of public regulation. The automatism of the accumulation process—growth for growth's sake—would not be there; nor would the encouragement to a greedy consumerism. Social costs and 'externalities' would be rendered more visible. But both productive and transactional efficiency would still be vital.

The more productive and resource-efficient are the various enterprises in the economy, the more they can contribute—and the more legislation and taxation can oblige them to contribute—to egalitarian and socially responsible goals. While it is true that the market is often blind to social cost, and may lead to unnecessary promotional and managerial expenditures, the methods of calculation it requires do encourage the minimization of production costs. Likewise the capitalist market is not good at registering social benefits; but this is not a reason for disregarding the real costs of production. In a capitalist context such costs will refer either to raw materials, labour or capital equipment. From either a socialist or Green perspective it will generally make sense to minimize the use of raw materials, the using up of equipment, or the expenditure of labour, for a given level of output; though since labour will not be a commodity whose price is determined by the market, the inclination to save labour will never take the form of depressing wages, as it can do in capitalism. While capitalist efficiency and socialist efficiency are quite different concepts, some connection exists between them.

One of the key institutional problems to be solved is that of the micro-economics of socialism—mechanisms which encourage the enterprise in a socialist economy to take full and adequate measure of social need and social cost, rather than simply pursue its own path in an egoistic or purblind fashion. For the foreseeable future this must include what Diane Elson has called 'socializing the market'.<sup>71</sup> Through the market, a socialist economy could both encourage and

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<sup>70</sup> This point is made by Jacques Bider, *Théorie de la modernité, sans le Marx et le marché*, Paris 1990, pp. 67–72. For the logic of competition in capitalist conditions, see Robert Brenner, 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: a Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', *NLR* 104, July–August 1977; and the same author's contribution to J. Elster, ed., *Analytic Marxism*, Cambridge 1987; also Israel Kirzner, *Competition and Entrepreneurship*, New York 1973; and the same author's contribution to Ellen F. Paul et al., *Capitalism*, New York 1990, pp. 163–82.

<sup>71</sup> See Diane Elson, 'Market Socialism or Socialization of the Market', *NLR* 172, November–December 1988, pp. 3–44.

regulate the activity of the millions of economic actors—including small cooperatives and partnerships—which any modern economy requires. Taxes and subsidies can be finely adjusted to meet social objectives and to promote the conservation of natural resources. A law on enterprises could require disclosure of the commercial data lying behind managerial decisions on prices, profits and investment. Elson suggests that Price Boards could help to lend visibility and responsibility to the workings of the market, whose often costly or counterproductive proclivities she documents.<sup>72</sup>

The need to monitor optimization with the use of market indicators is a lesson of Soviet and Chinese experience that can certainly not be ignored by socialists who wish to suppress capitalism in its global strongholds. The critique of Soviet 'War Communism' by Trotsky, Lenin and Bukharin, the later critique of Stalinist planning and industrialization by Trotsky and Bukharin, not to speak of the more recent critiques of hyper-centralization by Alec Nove or Su Shaozhi, actually have greater force the more complex the economy. An advanced socialist economy would have to tackle a planning and regulation problem of formidable complexity: institutionalize the power of consumers; allow for democratic consultation at the local, regional, national and international level; consider ecological costs as well as alternative uses; harmonize the activity of millions of autonomous economic agents, and so forth.

### Efficiency and Complexity in a Socialist Economy

A socialist system of economy that genuinely embraced democracy, social responsibility and self-management would not possess the enforced, and often illusory, simplicity and predictability of the administrative-command system. Thus in any modern economy each enterprise depends upon a host of suppliers and outlets. Each working

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<sup>72</sup> Elson's approach has some affinity with Pat Devine's *Democracy and Economic Planning*, Oxford 1988, with his outline of a scheme of 'negotiated coordination' of production. Devine is willing to accept that a market will be needed in a socialist economy, but not 'market forces'. However, there are several crucial problems that Devine's approach does not address. While the multimillion-product complexity of a modern economy can be monitored, requiring it to be positively 'negotiated' is asking a very great deal. Devine contemplates interindustry negotiating boards, but who determines which are the most appropriate links, and who ensures that outcomes are compatible with one another if they have been freely and separately negotiated? How do negotiations establish commonly accepted prices where there are differences of view and, perhaps, interest? In a democratic political structure one person has one vote. In a market structure the distribution of economic resources distributes power, whether evenly or otherwise, but at least a decision can be reached. But in a process of negotiated coordination, how are differences decided? Clearly it would not do for larger enterprises to prevail over smaller ones, or for those in a strategic position always to have their way. While market forces might remain fallible even where large concentrations of wealth are absent, at least a 'socialized market' could seek, by trial or error, to promote generally egalitarian and responsible, as well as reasonably efficient, outcomes. (The efficiency I refer to here is not, of course, to be identified with capitalist efficiency, for the reasons that I have tried to explain in the previous section.) Notwithstanding these comments, Devine's book does helpfully address questions of democracy in a socialist economy; his suggestions in this area would probably work all the better if 'negotiated coordination' were not overloaded with tasks that would be beyond it.

collective needs some room to experiment and improve; but at the same time, if the whole ensemble is to retain coherence, there must be a provisional—good enough—system of constraints, rewarding more effective and responsible work. The 'internal market' techniques used by some multinationals and public bodies to simulate the workings of the market can help identify excessive costs, though they should not be used to substitute for public choice. Similarly, so could the reverse-flow system of ordering parts in the celebrated Japanese 'can ban' or 'just in time' production process. In principle such a system makes the consumer the planner, issuing orders upstream from supplier to supplier at each different stage in the production process. This, it should be noted, is a device for coordination within a given economic space that does not require the different agents to represent different propertied interests.<sup>73</sup>

The Communist experience offers powerful support to the view that economic innovation requires some form of competition. The Soviet economy was able to register a purely quantitative growth; indeed by the 1980s the Soviet Union was the world's largest producer of coal, steel, electricity and cement. But the human purpose of such gigantic expenditure of energy and resources had been lost. Labour productivity was still very low, waste of every sort high, and a capacity to use these products in a socially useful way almost entirely lacking. Soviet 'planning' simply imposed a thoughtless incrementalism, with each plant or enterprise seeking to increase its output of goods or services relative to the previous period.

In some cases it may be that the calculations of an ecologist or technician will reveal the necessity of ending production of a given item without recourse to specifically economic calculation. But competitively established prices, in so far as they reflect material scarcities, will assist the subsequent search for benign substitutes and alternatives. The real costs and benefits of a project cannot always be established in advance, and some vital calculations will concern the best use of resources rather than (or, as well as) absolute indications one way or another. Thus ecological calculation might set an absolute limit on the use of a particular technique or raw material, but economic calculation might still be needed to indicate best use. If real market competition is allowed, then various conclusions follow. There should be mechanisms for monitoring and minimizing avoidable market failure of the sort itemized by Elson. But we should be aware that some costs are unavoidable and that a heavy price would be paid for shunning all risks. While the innovation permitted, and indeed stimulated, by economic competition can lead to vital productivity gains, it will certainly produce winners and losers. The context furnished by a socialized market could steer innovation in one direction rather than another—for example, towards the better use of scarce materials rather than the maximization of output. It could also set limits on winnings and losses, by safety-net provisions, so long as it did not erase the responsibility of economic agents for the consequences of their decisions.

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<sup>73</sup> For the 'can ban' system, see Masahiko Aoki, *Information, Incentives and Bargaining in the Japanese Economy*, Cambridge 1988, pp. 20–26.

It should be borne in mind that economic innovation is not quite the same as technical innovation. The Communist economies adapted some technical innovations quite successfully, but had a very poor record of meeting social need through economic innovation. The entrepreneur who spots that people would like a fresh, oven-hot bread roll or croissant in their lunch break may be making an economic discovery even though the ovens used are quite conventional or even technically inferior to those of the large bakers. Austrian economics sets great store by such entrepreneurship and rightly argues that it will not be found in a command economy. But a risk-taking socialized market system could encourage economic innovation of this sort. There would, however, then be a problem, this time caused by success not failure: how to stop the entrepreneur becoming a wealthy capitalist. In a capitalist economy the development of innovations is financed by the entrepreneur's bank, or the idea is bought out by a large corporation which might then employ the innovator. In the socialized market economy there could be a ceiling on the turnover of private firms, after which they would be obliged to find a public financial institution, or socialized enterprise, to back further development and, assuming ownership, reap the extra rewards or losses that this might entail.

### The Question of Ownership

The Austrian contention that economic responsibility in investment, or successful entrepreneurship, requires large-scale private ownership is contradicted by the performance of some enterprises even in the capitalist economies. The workings of the Mondragon Group of cooperatives in the Basque country suggest that non-capitalist ownership can produce effective economic performance. In Emilia-Romagna and in Jutland local authorities have sponsored a mixed economic complex, combining collective facilities with cooperative and small-scale private property. Some 'ethical' investment trusts, like Friends' Provident, and some state concerns, such as Volkswagen, Renault, ENI, the New Zealand Dairy Board, or Taiwan's state banks, show that private enterprise has no monopoly on social innovation and economic efficiency. Then there is the example of large concerns, such as Zeiss in Germany and the John Lewis Partnership in the UK, which are owned by their employees. Then again public-service broadcasting has identified and met needs ignored by the commercial media. There are different models and combinations here—for example, that of the BBC, making most of its own programmes, and that of the publicly owned Channel Four, which contracts for programmes from a multitude of independent producers. Because of the pressure of context all such examples furnish only a very partial notion of what a non-capitalist entrepreneurialism might look like. In a socialist economy a variety of socially owned financial institutions—state and regional banks, pension funds and philanthropic trusts—could offer finance in a competitive context to enterprises that would have to wax or wane according to how effectively they applied them. Taxation and social insurance, and a guaranteed minimum (and legal maximum) income, could prevent class-like inequalities resulting. While some elements of a contemporary capitalist economy might prefigure some features of

'socialist entrepreneurialism', the critical absence in the latter would be the momentum of capitalist accumulation and its propensity to plunder and divide.

The argument here is not at all that any type of market reform is to be welcomed, nor that the market plus state ownership furnishes the answer. The market reforms that have been, and are being, introduced in some still-Communist states have often managed to produce the worst of both worlds. They generate inequality and unemployment without yielding the productivity and (selective) consumer friendliness of an advanced capitalist system. This has been the Yugoslav and Soviet experience. Where there were a large number of modestly sized enterprises market reforms have at least succeeded in their own terms—for example, in China and Hungary this was so in both agriculture and light industry, but not in heavy industry. In China the advance of output in the marketized sector in the eighties was quite dramatic, generating economic inequality but also meeting the needs of its population more successfully than most large capitalist Third World states. (While per-capita agricultural output grew in China in the eighties, it declined in the less developed countries taken as a whole.) However, even in those Communist states most wedded to market reform there appeared inherent limits to the effective working of the vaunted rationality of the market system.

A critical failing from the standpoint of market rationality was that the Communist power system worked in such a way as to prevent the operation of competition in the vital sphere of the allocation of productive resources. Loss-making enterprises were protected by Kornai's famous 'soft-budget' constraint. Political influence ensured that large enterprises would not simply be condemned to bankruptcy. In this way the capitalist mechanism for ensuring the reallocation of productive assets was stifled. It came to seem to many market reformers, including Kornai, that only thoroughgoing privatization could introduce real efficiency in the allocation of investment. The capitalist restructuring of the seventies and eighties appeared to lend substance to this view.

The capitalist growth of the most recent period has by no means been concentrated only in large corporations. The mechanisms of competition allowed a plethora of small and new companies to build a position for themselves and to force transformations upon the dinosaurs of the rustbelts. This capitalist restructuring was not matched by the Soviet economy because the latter had no mechanism for ensuring that resources were channelled to the most efficient and innovative enterprises. Indeed, with few exceptions, the larger the Soviet enterprise the more political influence it wielded, and therefore the more subsidies it could command. The ruling parties in the Communist states gave no democratic representation to workers, but generally the rulers found it prudent to seek to organize the workers in the workplace; the Party apparatus and cadres in the industrial sector had a vested interest in defending the given industrial pattern, with its bias towards large-scale plants. In Poland the large factories retained enough influence to prevent the closing down of loss makers up to and beyond the collapse of Communist rule.

Having pointed out the role of competitive mechanisms in promoting productivity in capitalism, we should note that they nowadays rarely involve outright bankruptcy in the large enterprise sector. Takeovers and mergers play a more important part in the reorganization of assets, though bankruptcy remains significant in the small business sector. The sanctions of takeover and bankruptcy are unusual in the large corporation sector of the dynamic Southeast Asian capitalist economies. Thus in Japan the banks play an active role monitoring and protecting their clients. The prevalence of interlocking shareholdings between different large companies in distinct sectors constitute a defence mechanism against the corporate raider. Because these *keiretsu* straddle various sectors they are not so vulnerable to downturns. The banks believe that if a particular management is underperforming then it should be reorganized and removed without the generalized disruption of a bankruptcy. This is, in fact, more rational than the classic *laissez faire* approach, which can disperse an entire productive ensemble because of the failings of particular managers rather than confine its effects simply to the latter. The Japanese or Korean approach also contrasts with the high incidence of takeovers and mergers in the United States and Britain, often motivated by asset-stripping or a desire to impress investing institutions with no long-term commitments.<sup>74</sup> Presumably a socialist central planning authority could also devise effective but socially less disruptive and painful substitutes for bankruptcy and unemployment. The organization of publicly owned regional and industrial groups could help to ensure that social costs and benefits of economic restructuring were shared equally. Retraining on full pay, and legislation establishing a narrow gap between maximum and minimum incomes, would also help.

There is a risk with 'self-management socialism' or 'market socialism' that the notion of social ownership becomes too weak and diffuse, leading either to slackness and inefficiency or to selfish exploitation of a privileged position or access to privileged resources. Large-scale privatization, leading back to capitalism, may reduce inefficiency but would aggravate the problem of inequality and injustice. What is needed are forms of social property that make the direct producers really accountable for the effective use of the resources entrusted to them. In a capitalist economy the private owners—shareholders—have professional companies of auditors to check on management. There are also rules, though rather lax ones, concerning the publication of business information. While self-management should give working collectives a stake in efficiency and profitability, laws on disclosure of information (about, say, costs and prices) and the institution of a periodic 'social audit' could check tendencies to excessive and self-reproducing privilege, and could monitor infringements of ecological and egalitarian norms.

### New Models of Market Socialism

In the wake of Alec Nove's work a British school of 'market socialists'

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<sup>74</sup> For a comparative view of Japanese banks and *keiretsu*, see *ibid.*, pp. 119–22, 148–9, 232–3.



has developed within the Fabian Society. Its members are at pains to insist that they are not simply 'social democrats' tinkering with capitalism, but advocate policies that would lead to an economy where social ownership predominated and where there would be a variety of laws and institutions to promote enterprise democracy and social equality. On the other hand, they wholeheartedly embrace the market as an institution not only compatible with, but necessary to, these objectives. Their efforts are both complemented and questioned by the work of Włodzimierz Brus and Kazimierz Laski, *From Marx to the Market* (1989). The highly qualified support given by Brus and Laski to market socialism, and the knock-about critique of Anthony de Jasay, recall key themes of the 'calculation debate'.<sup>75</sup>

The new models of 'market socialism' share with the similar, though not identical, concept of the 'socialized market' a notion of economic institutions which is not monist. On the one hand, this means that no single economic institution is expected to guarantee all socially desirable outcomes; and on the other, it means that there will be a variety of public funds, holding companies or banks undertaking investment in competition with one another within a shared framework of legislation. Thus a broad social equality will be achieved partly by suppressing large-scale private property but also by income supplements and taxation. The general aim would be to secure the allocative advantages of the market with respect to investment while removing its distributional injustices with respect to income.

However, can proposals like this meet the classic Austrian objection that without capitalist ownership and inequalities entrepreneurs will not be sufficiently motivated to innovate, nor sufficiently responsible in the handling of the assets entrusted to them? While entrepreneurs are indeed motivated in capitalism by pecuniary considerations, there is no one-to-one quantitative relationship between entrepreneurial innovation and financial reward. Not all entrepreneurs are owners. While they may gain greatly from displays of entrepreneurial skill, the main gainers will normally be the real owners. Even if the former Guinness chief executive, Ernest Saunders, author of a—for the company's owners—highly lucrative takeover of the Distillers Company, was not in jail, he would not have been the main gainer. Indeed, the hired executive, the banker and stockbroker are all, in principle, economic agents who do not fully share in the gains or losses for which they are responsible. The owners of assets find that they can hire entrepreneurial skill in a reasonably competitive market. It is not clear that capitalism has ways of solving the 'principal/agent' problem that would not be available to market socialism.

Why could not publicly owned banks hire investment specialists or managers, just as banks or pension funds do in today's capitalism? The successful socialist entrepreneur, whether investment banker or

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<sup>75</sup> Julian Le Grand and Saul Estrin, eds., *Market Socialism*, Oxford 1989, developing an earlier Fabian pamphlet of 1986, Włodzimierz Brus and Kazimierz Laski, *From Marx to the Market*, Cambridge 1989, especially pp. 103–53, Anthony de Jasay, *Market Socialism: A Scrutiny*, Institute of Economic Affairs, London 1990.

manager, would not, of course, be able to claim the hypothetical 'full fruit' of the results of his or her expertise, but neither does the professional today. They would be able to derive intrinsic satisfactions from their job, and they could easily be offered well above the average rate of pay if this was found necessary to their motivation. In a generally egalitarian socialist society quite small differences of pay could be quite highly valued by certain individuals. And it might even be discovered that there were potential entrepreneurs who had been deterred by the morally obnoxious consequences of successful management under capitalism, such as depriving others of a livelihood by closing down a plant. And even in a pattern of socialist economy that encouraged worker-participation and enterprise democracy there would still be 'positional goods'; the elected manager, indeed, might obtain satisfaction from the discharge of his or her responsibilities rather more legitimately than the owner-appointed manager. If the more acceptable motives failed to work, would not the recourse to differential economic rewards re-create class division? A principled realism might allow that if incomes vary only modestly, and are prevented from being invested in ownership of productive property, then this could permit some incentive element without allowing social differentiation to acquire class-like self-reproducing dimensions and forms.<sup>76</sup>

The banks or holding companies could be encouraged to make a proportion of their funds available for more risky investments or for socially desirable investments, by tax breaks. They could be encouraged to display responsibility as well as initiative by linking them to corporate entities based on pension funds or municipal development boards. The 'social' in social ownership should not be derived from one privileged economic agent—the nation-state—but from a plethora of differently constituted but accountable public bodies. The exact nature of the bodies will no doubt itself reflect the route to socialization. Thus in Sweden the original version of the Meidner plan based socialization on the sharply increasing importance of pension funds. It conferred on these funds more concentrated economic powers in given regions—making them owners of enterprises rather than passive rentiers, the preferred role of Anglo-Saxon institutional investors. It might be objected that where concerns like this fail, blameless sections of the population would lose pension rights. However, there are two responses to this. Firstly, individuals would have more than one revenue source—a guaranteed basic and occupational income—

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<sup>76</sup> Engels would have smiled at such a concession. He mocked Dühring's pompous suggestion that 'society honours itself in conferring distinction on the higher types of professional ability by a moderate additional allocation for consumption', riposting that 'Herr Dühring, too, honours himself, when, combining the innocence of the dove with the subtleness of a serpent, he displays such touching concern for the moderate additional consumption of the Dührings of the future.' Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p. 365. In general Engels's critical comments on Dühring's proposals have a certain bearing on market-socialist projects and should not be dismissed out of hand, even if his own brief sketch of a fully planned alternative is unconvincing. On the question of pay differentials, a problem that would present itself to any socialist economy that was not entirely global would be the need to discourage specialists from emigrating; this practical consideration says nothing about social justice, which would have to take account of the fact that specialists have usually benefited from support during training.

and pensions themselves could be spread between two or three funds as a legal minimum. Gains and losses would not therefore be wiped out but would rather counteract one another. Secondly, it seems that mature capitalist economies are anyway moving in the direction of creating an ever larger institutional sector of investment, characterized by a situation where the supposed beneficiaries enjoy only a very inferior species of ownership. This sector is prey either to under-performance or to scandal as it becomes obvious that the agents are not giving good service to the nominal principals (the recent US savings and loan scams being only the latest example). Facing up to the real problems encountered in this area, market socialism or the socialized market could greatly increase visibility and accountability.

In a different but possibly complementary approach a further 'market socialist' model has been proposed by Ortuño, Roemer and Silvestre. In this, a variety of socially owned enterprises are regulated by means of a central bank, or set of financial institutions, which lends money to enterprises, charges interest to enterprises, and pays out the proceeds in the form of an equal social dividend to every citizen. This model allows for a greater degree of central planning than do the Fabian 'market socialists'. It shows that government at a regional, national and international level would have a powerful lever for promoting equality, efficiency and welfare, since the financial authorities would be responsible for supplying money for all investments and could steer the economy by making these funds available to different sectors at differentially discounted interest rates.<sup>77</sup> However, within such constraints the decision whether or not to invest would be taken by enterprises independently. Presumably the financial authorities would also have some discretion in deciding whether or not to foreclose on enterprises that failed to service loans; but even if they did foreclose, the former employees would have the social dividend to fall back on, as well as social insurance. The authors describe this social dividend in terms of a 'social surplus' which should be shared amongst all equally, in token of equal civic rights—and also, perhaps, of the fact that the social context of combined labour is the secret of its productivity, which should not be attributed to individuals taken in isolation.

### The Socialized Market and Anti-capitalism

Green politics, with its frequent insistence on the small-scale and on the need for decentralization, might seem to have little or nothing to learn from the debacle of Communism. Yet some varieties of Communism — Maoism for example—also had their variants of these watchwords, while Green politics itself has already produced minority currents displaying authoritarianism and misanthropy. There are radical or deep ecologists who insist that humanity is a plague species and that its numbers have to be reduced by some means from five thousand million to five hundred million. Such notions are often accompanied by advocacy of sweeping plans for the radical simplification of all social

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<sup>77</sup> Ignacio Ortuño Ortín, J.E. Roemer and J. Silvestre, 'Market Socialism', Working Paper No 335, Department of Economics, University of California at Davis. Clearly it is beyond the scope of this article to further explicate this impressive model here.

and economic processes. The experience of twentieth-century Communism should be one cautionary example to consider when evaluating such proposals.

On the other hand, many of the main Green parties have adopted a perspective generally compatible with the 'socialized market'. They favour the construction of integrated local economies, combining public services with a plethora of modest-sized cooperatives and partnerships, financed by banks with selective investment criteria. They support, as an immediate demand, the call for a guaranteed basic income for all citizens. This latter demand has also been adopted by a number of Europe's 'new left' parties, notably the newly launched Left Alliance in Finland. It is argued by supporters of guaranteed basic income that it would provide a far more flexible and less bureaucratic route to a universal welfare system, dispensing with the need for cumbersome and intrusive means tests. While this measure would immediately tackle the primary poverty of the homeless and destitute, some advocates believe that it would inaugurate a progressive alleviation of the dependency of workers on employers (involving, in some conceptions, progressive 'de-proletarianization'). Clearly, to have such effects the guaranteed basic income would have to be set at a generous level. This proposal resembles the classic market-socialist concept of the 'social dividend', as outlined by Oskar Lange and recently refined by Ortuño, Roemer and Silvestre.

An attractive feature of some of these arguments is that they readily link up today's movements and struggles with ultimate objectives. Similarly, there is a new conception of trade unionism that links conventional struggles over pay and conditions to campaigns for a shorter working week and for ecological and feminist goals.<sup>78</sup> There are also adjuncts to, or variants of, social ownership and control, which have emerged from the experience of left-wing or 'red-green' municipalities. These include the insistence that any enterprise benefiting from a public contract adhere to certain employment and ecological norms. Such municipalities have also experimented with forms of 'entrepreneurial socialism' in which working collectives put in a competitive tender to lease facilities for a specified period, at the end of which they have to give an accounting of their activities.<sup>79</sup> Such conceptions help to constitute a bridge between today's struggles and the goal of a socialized market.

As this article has undertaken to defend the necessity of the socialized market, I ought, perhaps, make it clear that such a market should incorporate and institutionalize the quite justified suspicion of market processes that has marked the history of capitalism, and which has led to repeated, but only partially successful, attempts to curb the relentless processes of capitalist accumulation that have dominated it. Thus André Gorz has argued in his *Critique of Economic Reason* that the

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<sup>78</sup> See, for example, André Gorz, 'Labour's New Agenda', *NLR* 184, November–December 1990, pp. 37–46.

<sup>79</sup> For these and many further examples, see Robin Murray, 'Ownership, Control and the Market', *NLR* 164, July–August 1987, pp. 87–112.

Austrian cult of the 'free' market menaces the integrity of the life-world upon which the economy itself rests; it promotes heedless consumerism and stifles enterprise democracy. He points to the way in which successive social struggles—against slavery and the slave trade, for the eight-hour day, for trade-union rights, against ecological degradation or the yawning gap between North and South—derive from widespread distrust of the market.<sup>80</sup>

An important socialist tradition, stretching in Britain from William Morris to Raymond Williams, has opposed the corrupting and destructive logic of pervasive commercialization and passive consumerism. Yet the market itself, in and through the reactions to it, also broadens the potential scope of human solidarity. Thus the market should be socialized not only 'from above', through the action of the state, but also 'from below', through the pressures of working collectives and communities. Thus in the capitalist market information about products and services is provided either by those who supply them or by media which rely on such interested advertising. In a socialized market the more wasteful types of advertising could be minimized, and resources given to bodies and media representing the consumers.

### The Economic Success of Impure Capitalism

But, the Hayekian critic could object, all such attempts to revise or improve upon the market, whether piecemeal or wholesale, will ultimately have disastrous effects. By sapping efficiency they will ultimately ensure that we are all worse off. Yet in the capitalist world today it is by no means clear that obeisance to the market is the royal road to success, even in capitalist terms. Thus Southeast Asian capitalism departs widely from free-market prescription.

Indeed if we compare South Korea and Taiwan with the Communist states we are faced with a paradox. The successes of these states are often explained by such factors as (1) land reform, eliminating the old landlords and guaranteeing farmers' income by government subsidy; (2) state planning and state ownership of key industrial sectors; (3) government manipulation of the economy, including 'getting prices wrong'; (4) a conformist ideology, stressing hard work and deferred gratification; (5) a tough regime, repressing popular opposition. The fit is remarkably close, while the economic results are so different. The paradox is sharpened if we register the extent to which the Southeast Asian states have avoided the extremes of wealth and poverty

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<sup>80</sup> See André Gorz, *The Critique of Economic Reason*, London 1989, pp. 127–33, for Gorz's discussion of this point. I have myself sought to show the crucial and progressive role of the anti-capitalist impulse in the construction of anti-slavery in *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, London 1988, especially pp. 27–8, 39, 89, 93–5, 118–19, 223, 446, 499, 533–6. I was drawn to focus on this question because of a recent attempt to endow the market with moral qualities unsuspected even by Mises and Hayek. See Thomas Haskell, 'Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1', *American Historical Review*, vol. 90, no. 2, April 1985; 'Part 2', *American Historical Review*, vol. 90, no. 3, June 1985; and the same author's reply to critics in the *American Historical Review*, vol. 92, no. 4, 1987.

found elsewhere in the capitalist world; while economic egalitarianism is rarely cited as a factor in Southeast Asian success, it is often cited as a factor in Communist failure. Yet *The Economist* recently noted: 'Unlike most developing countries, Taiwan and Korea grew fast and sharply reduced income inequalities at the same time. In 1970, when Korea's GNP per head was still only about \$1,300 in today's money, by one measure it had a more equal income distribution than Japan or the United States. In 1952 the income of the best-off 20 per cent of Taiwanese households was 15 times the income of the lowest 20 per cent; by 1980 the multiple was only 4.2. The equivalent in America that year was 7.5, in Sweden a year later 5.6, in Japan a year earlier 4.4. For much of the past two years Taiwan has been the world's most egalitarian society, as well as one of the half-dozen fastest-growing ones.'<sup>81</sup>

So why does this surrogate 'bourgeois Stalinism' work so much better than the real thing? Clearly it is significant that these two states received large and sustained aid packages from the United States; and even more significant that they could trade reasonably freely with the more advanced countries. (Soviet performance in the thirties and forties was, indeed, a little closer to Southeast Asian patterns.) Consequently the Southeast Asian strategy of 'governing the market' was geared to exports, while the Communist states, giving priority to local development, treated trade as an optional extra. While the East Asian states were market-oriented at one level (oriented to the export market), at another they were quite prepared to use the segmentation of markets, in particular the disjuncture between the internal and external market, to subsidize and protect their economic growth. Their industrial strategy was based on investment in consumer-goods industries, in contrast to the Soviet emphasis on producer goods.<sup>82</sup> As Japan pioneered the Southeast Asian pattern while respecting bourgeois democratic norms, it does not seem that military dictatorship is a vital ingredient in the mixture that has yielded economic success. It would probably be more to the point to explore the historical conditions that broke the resistance of traditional elites but enabled traditional sources of social cohesion, discipline and motivation to be tapped. Yet, at all events, the market mechanism plays only a subordinate part in the story.<sup>83</sup>

The relative economic successes of Germany or Sweden would also be hard to explain in terms of dedication to *laissez faire*. Of course socialists would not be content with Taiwanese-style equality any more than they would stop at Korean- or Japanese-style worker participation or German-style *Mitbestimmung* or Swedish-style welfarism. Nonetheless, these societies are among the most prosperous and successful in the world, and perhaps a part of the reason for this is that in some small but not insignificant particular they do not conform to a purely

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<sup>81</sup> *The Economist*, 14 July 1990

<sup>82</sup> See, in particular, Amaden, 'Third World Industrialization', also, Robert Wade, *Governing the Market: Economic Theory and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialization*, Princeton 1990

<sup>83</sup> See Karel van Wolferen, *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, New York 1989, pp. 375-408

capitalist logic or form of organization. Beyond the features already mentioned, each of these societies gives huge public funding to the formation of 'social capital', in the shape of education, research and training. While this investment has reaped an impressive societal return, it has not been subordinated to narrow commercial criteria.

These experiences suggest that an 'impure' capitalism works better, in capitalist terms, than undiluted private enterprise. Even if we consider the heart of capitalist private property, conundrums and contradictions seem to be of the essence. For example, the threat of takeover and the so-called 'market in management' seemed to give back to shareholders a means of making managers attentive to their interests. Jasay argues that: 'The owner-manager who has absolute security of managerial tenure, is potentially more inefficient than the professionally run corporation, since he is much freer not to 'maximize', and can indulge his fancies—as the history of so many family-owned firms and of capricious robber barons demonstrates.'<sup>84</sup> While this praise of the market in management may seem reasonable, it does not capture the way that corporations actually function in the United States or Britain, where the market in corporate control operates most vigorously. In these economies there is now every sign that managers can bid up their salaries and perks to levels that hugely outstrip company performance. Thus between 1980 and 1989 US company profits broadly stagnated, output and wages grew by about a half, but chief executives' remuneration grew by 160 per cent.<sup>85</sup> In these two countries institutions are responsible for a large slice of capital formation. These institutions—mainly insurance and pension funds—buy or sell shares purely with an eye to short-term financial performance, producing the phenomenon of what *The Economist* calls 'punter capitalism'. The professionals who run the institutions tend to be indulgent to managers, while the policyholders who supply the cash enjoy a third-rate type of ownership. By contrast, in Japan and Germany, up until fairly recently, bank debt furnished the major source of finance for large industrial companies. As these banks could not simply 'sell' debts owing to them, they were forced to take a more long-term and intimate interest in the fate of the concerns that they were financing.<sup>86</sup>

The point being made here is somewhat Hayekian, since the focus is on the responsibility with which economic agents make decisions, rather than the more narrowly conceived notion of individual motivation. On the other hand, it is anti-Hayekian in so far as the requisite degree of economic discipline has been produced not by ownership but by credit. This would seem to vindicate the market-socialist proposal to use credit as a regulatory mechanism to encourage the efficient use of resources. Does this mean that 'socialist banks' might have the power to deny credit or to remove elected managers? And if a rival socialist bank or holding company was willing to take on an

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<sup>84</sup> Jasay, *Market Socialism*, p. 25.

<sup>85</sup> *The Economist*, 'Capitalism Survey', 5–11 May, 1990, p. 10.

<sup>86</sup> 'Capitalism Survey', *The Economist*, provides evidence for the claims in this paragraph.

enterprise that its original sponsor found excessively risky, or poorly managed, who will discipline the banks and holding companies? *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* And how should credit be distributed on an international basis, and subject to what international regulatory principles? While there are problems here, they are far from being irresolvable in principle by socialists; nor, as the Third World debt and the 'principal/agent problem' show, have they all been solved by capitalism, even by its own standards.

### The Challenge of Global Poverty and Protection

In a global market system some economies will be found to do better than others. If this inegalitarian momentum was checked in too crude a fashion—siphoning most of the surplus away from the most efficient—it would make everyone worse off. However, if international financial agencies were to promote, even 'create', purchasing power in poorer countries, and penalize rich-nation protectionism, then this could have an evening-up rather than levelling-down logic. Today the industrial and agricultural protectionism of the advanced countries is a major barrier to development in the Third World and former 'Second World'. And, consequent upon the Third World debt mountain, the almost complete drying up of credit compounds the problem, leaving the poor countries reliant on the narrow-minded, stingy treasuries of the rich countries.

Socialists cannot afford to ignore Hayek's taunt that their schemes only ever extended to the favoured few: 'What socialists seriously contemplate the equal divisions of existing capital resources among the people of the globe? They all regard the capital as belonging not to humanity but to the nation—though even within the nation few dare to advocate that the richer regions should be deprived of some of their capital . . . to help the poorer regions.'<sup>87</sup> The yawning inequalities in the world cannot be removed at a single stroke; such would be politically impossible and might even make everyone worse off. But that does not mean, as Hayek might imply, that the poor countries should be left to the tender mercies of the 'free market'. (However, note that Hayekian liberalism is not the worst offender here, inasmuch as Austrian economics does not defend First World protectionism.)

The overall aim should be continually to improve the absolute position of the worst-off, consistent with transition to a new model of production and consumption based on sustainable growth. The revenue from tariffs and taxes on the deployment of scarce resources could be devoted to funds for developing the poorer regions, employing benign technologies not subject to such taxation. These funds could also be beneficiaries of exploitation of the sea bed, to be conducted with rigorous ecological safeguards. The market socialists rightly argue that political democracy, giving every individual an equal vote, is more egalitarian than the market, which privileges purchasing power.

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<sup>87</sup> F.A. von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, London 1944, pp. 140–1.



Thus, both nationally and internationally, democratic institutions must be used to check on market performance.<sup>88</sup>

The massive scale of global poverty and the global threat to ecology help to constitute powerful arguments for public enterprise and planning on a global scale. But the very fact that these problems are posed at their most acute at the level of the world as a whole should remind us that the answer cannot be a global command economy. As I have already pointed out, some types of planning actually inhibit the micro-calculation that can promote recycling. Of course the initiative of a planning authority could give decisive encouragement in vital areas—for example, to developing alternatives to fossil fuels as an energy source. But market regulation will also provide means of promoting ecological responsibility that cannot be achieved by relying on simple administrative fiat. Thus a heavy tax on fossil fuels can both inhibit use and promote the search for renewable and less deleterious sources of energy—which does not mean that research and investment into the latter could not also be promoted by other, more direct, means. We should also be keenly aware of the point made by Diane Elson that there are widely different sorts of markets, reflecting different social settings and forms of regulation. The capitalist market stimulates an insatiable pattern of consumption that is incompatible with the constraints of scarce resources. It would be vital to ensure that the socialized market did not have the same results, and there is some reason for supposing that this would not be so since the impulses of competition would be monitored and constrained in different ways.

The critique of socialist planning has relevance for any project for a non-capitalist economy. Those who shun the term 'socialist' but still aspire to suppress the insatiable momentum of capitalist accumulation have to confront many of the same obstacles and objections noted above. The ecological crisis certainly lends a new interest to Otto Neurath's argument for intergenerational responsibilities, for an economy attentive to natural limits, and for pluralist planning. There is now an overwhelming case for one or several international planning agencies tracking both the use of scarce resources and the likely effects of production decisions and consumption trends on global ecological systems. Such agencies could be given information-gathering powers and even emergency veto powers. Though they should have resources to conduct their own educational campaigns, it would not be appropriate for them to have the power actually to prescribe patterns of production 'down to the last button'. The socialist contributors to the 'calculation debate' of the thirties argued for planning authorities to use a 'simulated market' to guide their actions. It would be more

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<sup>88</sup> In international bodies there would be a strong case for representation to be allocated according to population. Insuring representativeness is a difficulty in international bodies where it is governments that do the representing. The following proposal would meet this problem, though its purpose might be frustrated by intimidation: juries chosen at random, on the classical Athenian model, could be asked either to reduce or increase their own country's share of votes according to their evaluation of their government's success in representing them. While this might prove quite unworkable, the principle that only governments be represented in international bodies should not just be accepted and assumed.

appropriate if governments and electorates had available to them 'simulated plans' that could be used to devise, and modify, the regulation of the socialized markets.

International trade is now so extensive and important that the institutions of the 'socialized market' in one country, or group of countries, could help to extend its principles to others. Thus in a submission to the Socialist Group of the European Parliament concerning textiles, 'Working Women Worldwide' proposed 'social regulation' of the textile trade, such that no garment, wherever produced, should be marketed in the Community unless it met certain quality standards with respect to the conditions of its production. The organization explained: 'Absolute standards for conditions of production should include health and safety; rights of workers to overtime pay, redundancy pay, maternity pay, sickness benefit; rights of workers to organize; facilities of workers to organize.' However, to prevent covert protectionism the proposal adds: 'Different levels of economic development mean that it is not feasible to set absolute standards for hours of work or wages. Relative standards for hours of work and pay would need to be set related to each country's norms. The standards would need to be met at the enterprise level. It is no use just examining what legislation a country has on the statute books . . . Much more stringent labelling requirements could be introduced so that consumer products carry not just a brand name but also the name of the parent firm, the country of origin, whether the conditions of production just meet or exceed the standards set.'<sup>89</sup>

In order to meet familiar risks of market failure, the whole sector of agriculture and primary production is today covered by extensive national and international regulation. Sometimes privileged special interest finds a nesting place in such regulation. However, the answer is not wholesale deregulation but an attempt to identify and root out the defence of privilege. It is often the case that agricultural and primary production concerns the whole livelihood and integrity of a given community; so in such cases there are excellent grounds for closely considering social costs before allowing market factors to operate.

An international socialist planning body would have plenty to do in ensuring that its regulations and interventions promoted social equality, ecological responsibility and civic fulfilment, without undertaking responsibility for the entirety of global production. If some of Marx's rhetoric now seems overly simple, this emphatically does not apply to the previously cited aphorism that sums up his vision of the principle that should govern the future society: that the precondition for the free development of each would be the free development of all. The question I have been addressing is really that of discovering economic mechanisms which embody this principle in both a dispersed and concentrated way throughout the entire pattern of a global economy. The harsh contrasts of wealth and poverty in the modern world—and the spectre of ecological catastrophe—demand global and regional planning; but they also require a framework of economic

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<sup>89</sup> Submission on the Future of the Multifibre Arrangement, Women Working Worldwide, Textile and Garment Project, University of Manchester, March 1990

cooperation that encourages responsible initiative and innovation in a myriad of citizens.

### The Dynamic of Communist Collapse

My advocacy of the 'socialized market' may appear ill-judged just at the moment when the populations of the former Communist states are discovering the appalling social costs of their experiment in *laissez faire* shock therapy, attempted privatization and doctrinaire ultra-liberalism. The elaboration of a socialized market requires vigorous and various forms of social ownership, not privatization. It also requires an authoritative, competent and democratic set of local, national and regional state bodies. As the peoples of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are now discovering, a lively civil society and a coherent market both require a strong framework of public authority and support. The vital areas of communication, culture and education invariably require public subsidy. The imposition of narrow commercial criteria menaces the integrity of civil society, and hands the initiative to rapacious commercial interests, such as the media empires of Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell.<sup>90</sup>

Thus opposition to *laissez faire* and privatization should not mean support for given state structures, many of which are quite compromised and discredited. In the Soviet Union today there is a widespread social revolt against the centre, which could lead either towards 'self-managed' capitalism or 'self-managed' socialism. It is a striking fact that the Soviet 'new left' opposes privatization but does not offer blanket opposition to 'the market'.<sup>91</sup> Neither do the more politically active and leftist Soviet workers—at a meeting of factory committees in Togliatti in September 1990, those assembled demanded the ending of ministerial control; while they offered no definite economic alternative of their own, it is clear that economic revival would be facilitated by the existence of a state and property system whose legitimacy was widely accepted. So far as the state is concerned this must mean full acceptance of democracy. And so far as the property system is concerned it rules out large-scale private ownership since this does not enjoy wide backing from the Soviet public.

Socialists are, not without reason, suspicious of the ideological forces generated by the capitalist market; I have suggested above some ways in which a socialized market could prevent or discourage wasteful or

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<sup>90</sup> As it happens, one of the best recent summary statements of the case for state intervention and social planning comes from Nove, doubtless drawing upon his experience of Margaret Thatcher's Britain on this occasion. See Alec Nove, 'The Role of Central Planning under Capitalism and Market Socialism', in Jon Elster and Karl Ove Moene, eds., *Alternatives to Capitalism*, Cambridge 1989, pp. 98–109.

<sup>91</sup> The invitation to the December 1990 meeting in Leningrad of the Soviet Socialist Party declared: 'Market relations are necessary but should not become the chief regulator of economic and social life. The market should play the role of a regulating mechanism, facilitating the responsiveness of the economy, but its action should not extend to the extra-economic sphere and should not determine the priorities of development.' Peter Uhl, interviewed in *NLR* 179, January–February 1990, took a similar stance

irresponsible invitations to consume. But it should also be acknowledged that the pattern of nationalized property in the Communist states also produces unlovely ideologies—notably an intolerant nationalism and an excessively tolerant attitude towards traditional patriarchy. This is partly because the nationalized command economy tended towards national self-sufficiency, and reduced the variety of contacts between those of different national groups. It is also because it encouraged its citizens to see economic distribution in very tangible, zero-sum terms. In practice, many goods are acquired through a network of favours and obligations that all too easily reflect and reinforce ties of kinship and ethnicity. Whereas the impersonality of the capitalist market hides too much—including social costs and human exploitation—the non-market aspects of the Communist command economies fosters a pernicious and pervasive personalism, such that satisfaction of the most trivial personal needs involves tedious obligations and the negotiation of an informal conspiracy against other citizens. For their part the state authorities, lacking other sources of legitimacy and aware of their economic failures, often seek to exploit nationalism and communalism.

In the account I have offered of the crisis of Communism I have placed great emphasis on its failings at the economic level. I have done this not because I regard the other grave failings as of little account. The denial of democracy, of individual rights, and of rights of free association themselves intersect in complex ways with the economy, as Martov, Kautsky and Trotsky all insisted. One might add that the conformism and stupor of so much of the official culture of the Communist states has also made a contribution to their collapse. The cultural inertia of the Communist states is not only a by-product of their denial of democracy, though there is certainly a link here too. While Communism was capable of arousing a messianic fervour, it was also, like Christianity and Islam in their heyday, capable of inspiring significant cultural achievement. The best work of the recipients of the Prizes handed out in Stalin's time—Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Ehrenberg, Sholokov—or the work of the fellow travellers in other lands—Brecht, Neruda, Hikmet, McDiarmid, Aragon, Picasso, Chaplin, and so forth—was not exactly Stalinist, but it certainly was not robustly anti-Stalinist. It would be a fallacy to suppose that bad politics always produces bad art. Of course, the impact of Stalinism on the built environment was generally dreary and oppressive. However, the Moscow metro system is not only clean and efficient but a genuinely impressive and exuberant example of the use of public space, to which even the unabashed elements of kitsch make their own contribution; the metro, unlike other prestige projects, was of immediate utility to the mass of the population, a circumstance which may have made it easier to realize. The best work of the immediate post-Stalin period was certainly anti-Stalinist; though very often, as Lukács pointed out in the case of Solzhenitsyn, it could be interpreted as a species of critical realism. In the seventies and eighties, the cultural inertness of the Communist states made them vulnerable to the cultural vitality of the non-Communist world. The Communist authorities could not insulate their populations from the cultural products of the West, and on occasion actively promoted them; in East Germany

the GDR authorities actually relayed Western television to parts of the country, such as Dresden, which had difficulty in receiving signals from the Federal Republic. Of course the vitality of popular culture in the West or South is not capitalist, drawing as it frequently does on a variety of impulses, some of them utopian or resistant. But as the theorists of the 'society of the spectacle', or the postmodern, have pointed out, the cultural logic of late capitalism has been able to ally itself with the electronic media in ways that proved to be beyond the post-Stalinist command economies.

The defeat of Communism has thus been the defeat of a type of social formation which gave too little scope for popular initiative and pluralism, or self-recognition and self-activity (whether collective or individual), either in economic life, politics or culture. This defeat was inflicted on Communism partly by internal forces, such as Solidarity in Poland or Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, and partly through the tremendous external pressure of a species of capitalism that had compromised in various ways with popular interests and energies. The method of historical and cultural materialism itself would recommend that we seek the reason for the West's superiority in the realms of political economy, understood in the broad sense indicated above. The Communist crises of 1989–90 can be distinguished from those centred in the Hungarian uprising of 1956, or the Prague Spring of 1968, by the greater salience of this 'external' pressure of systemic competition. Though the whole point is that the external had become the internal; for, as Gorbachev told the United Nations in 1988—consciously or unconsciously echoing Che Guevara's observation of 1964—a 'closed society' is not possible in the modern world.

### Socialism and Social Forces

The crisis of socialism and Marxism has been considered here as a crisis of its inherited programmes. These programmes are by no means wholly useless, and some precariously survive through popular support even within today's capitalism. However, the crisis of socialism is also reflected in the weakness of the social forces which might sustain these programmes. The traditional left parties have been weakened by a combination of electoral decline and, at a more fundamental level, a decline in the activity, enthusiasm and social embeddedness of their supporters. The old style of leftist national-liberation movement is also almost defunct.

Yet on the other hand, there are what might be called new proletarian and new left movements. In the South these might include the Brazilian Labour Party (PT), the South African UDF/ANC, or the South Korean opposition, which all have a strong relationship to new trade unions without conforming to the old labourist model. In Europe a thoroughgoing programmatic renewal of left parties has produced new formations of significant size in Finland, Norway, Denmark, Spain, Turkey and the Netherlands, while Green and feminist ideas have a pervasive influence. In the post-Communist states there are already the first stirrings of social resistance to the imposition of the 'unsocial' market and of a form of privatization that favours the old

nomenklatura and mafia.<sup>92</sup> In some cases the remaining members of the old parties and unions are trying to establish credentials as the defenders of producers' interests, winning a tenth or more of the popular vote. And former oppositionists who now find their hopes traduced by the socially regressive and undemocratic features of the new order are also appearing.

These new social forces are already transforming the historic programmes of the Left. Almost no-one is nostalgic for the command economy. While there are many different elements that might help to constitute an alternative—new concepts of trade unions, of self-management, of cooperative and municipal enterprise, of contract compliance and basic income, of market socialism and the socialized market, of egalitarian and ecological responsibility—it is probable that they do not yet comprise a fully comprehensive and coherent package that could replace the logic of capitalism. Nevertheless there is here a variety of models, measures and movements from which an effective programme promises to develop. There is an evident connection with the values of the traditional Left, just as there are major issues scarcely identified by the traditional movements. Kautsky, for all his virtues, was undoubtedly one of the more stolid and less imaginative traditional Marxists. Yet he had no hesitation in declaring that 'Socialism as such is not our goal, which is rather the abolition of every kind of exploitation or oppression, be it directed against a class, a party, a sex, or a race.'<sup>93</sup> Although creditable, such a declaration does not address today's ecological crisis, which undoubtedly calls for a new model of consumption and production as well. The future belongs only to a 'socialism without guarantees', or even to some new concept more adequately embodying the goals of the Left and the creative impulses of anti-capitalist movements. In this connection, Raymond Williams's reflection on industrial capitalism retains all its force: 'We want more, much more, in its place than a chaotic breakdown or an imposed order or the mere name of an alternative. The challenge is therefore to a necessary complexity. I have been pulled all my life . . . between simplicity and complexity, and I can still feel the pull both ways. But every argument of experience and of history now makes my decision—and what I hope will be a general decision—clear. It is only in very complex ways, and by moving confidently towards very complex societies, that we can defeat imperialism and capitalism and begin that construction of many socialisms which will liberate and draw upon our real and now threatened energies.'<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See Lewis Siegelbaum and Theodore Friedgut, 'Perestroika from Below: The Soviet Miners' Strike and its Aftermath', *NLR* 181, May–June 1990, pp. 5–32.

<sup>93</sup> Kautsky, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, p. 3. This phrase is an echo of the Erfurt programme.

<sup>94</sup> Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*, London 1979, p. 437.

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Deputy General Secretary

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COURTESY RONALD FIELDMAN FINE ARTS, NEW YORK

Komar & Melamid *The Origin of Socialist Realism* 1982-83



## *Scenes from the Future: Komar & Melamid*

'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.' Gramsci's famous dictum, written in his prison notebook in 1930,<sup>1</sup> seems to describe two apparently disparate situations—the Soviet Union, plunged into its long succession crisis, which began after the death of Stalin, and now entering an unpredictable and chaotic new phase; and (in the West) the succession crisis of a dying modernism, whose 'great variety of morbid symptoms' have been given the provisional name of 'post-modernism'. The two are intimately linked, however, in the trajectory of Komar & Melamid, two Soviet artists, formed in the post-Stalin epoch, who arrived in New York just in time to find themselves potential 'postmodernists'. In fact, their artistic careers are now more or less evenly divided in extent between the Soviet Union and the United States. They date their first collaborative work from 1965, when they were both students at the Stroganov Institute of Art and Design in Moscow; they left the Soviet Union twelve years later, in 1977, and (after a year in Israel) arrived in New York in 1978.<sup>2</sup>

In the Soviet Union, modernism was brutally expunged by Stalin. However, it would be misleading to see the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s as simply an extension of the Western avant-gardes of the same period. As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> modernism must itself be seen in the context of cultural 'Americanism' (or its underlying substrate, 'Fordism', the reorganization of factory labour by Henry Ford which made modern mass production possible and thus fuelled the upsurge of a more productive US capitalism). The emblematic imagery of the assembly line, the power house, the chronometer and the robot all reflect this fascination. But the fantastic prospect of 'Americanism' was naturally more pronounced the further a nation was, practically and historically, from its real possibility; the more recent its own industrialization. In England, home of the first industrial revolution, the avant-garde hardly existed. In France, alongside Le Corbusier and Léger, we find an anti-Fordist avant-garde led by Breton; in Germany, the expressionists were ousted from their prewar dominance by the impact of the 'Fordist' Bauhaus. In the Soviet Union, the avant-garde was the most militant of all, dominated by the imagery of construction, production, engineering, the machine and the factory, to the extent, in many cases, of abandoning art altogether for industrial design or publicity. This was the avant-garde of Mayakovsky, Tatlin, Vertov, Rodchenko and others, which Stalin so ruthlessly suppressed.

The irony, of course, was that Stalin himself was committed to his own brand of Fordism, as a model for the industrialization of the Soviet Union and his project of 'catching up with the West'. Indeed, he revered Henry Ford, invited his engineers, his management specialists and his architects to the Soviet Union, and commissioned them to build no less than 521 factories, beginning with a tractor plant in Stalingrad in 1930. This mammoth task of 'Fordization', led by Albert Kahn and his brother Moritz, lasted just over two years, concluding triumphantly in 1933 with the completion of the giant works at Cheliabinsk.<sup>4</sup> However, Stalin was not interested in 'Americanizing' art. Though he could make use of phrases defining artists as 'engineers of the human soul', he wanted a realist form of art, fully integrated with the ideological apparatus of the Party. The trinity of 'Party, Ideology and People' was proclaimed, simply transposing the tsarist model of 'Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nation', just as the academic institutions, styles and shibboleths of absolutism were also revived.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, by a strange paradox, Stalin's project was to combine a Fordist industrial revolution in the base with a neo-tsarist cultural counter-revolution in the superstructure, freezing Soviet culture in the

<sup>1</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London 1971.

<sup>2</sup> For an account of Komar & Melamid's career, see Carter Ratchiff, *Komar & Melamid*, New York 1988. Melvyn B. Nathanson, ed., *Komar/Melamid, Two Soviet Dissident Artists*, Carbondale 1979, provides a detailed treatment of their early Soviet work.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Cinema/Americanism/The Robot', *New Formations*, no. 8, Summer 1989.

<sup>4</sup> W. Hawkins Ferry, *The Legacy of Albert Kahn*, Detroit 1970.

<sup>5</sup> John Bowlt, 'The Stalin Style: The First Phase of Socialist Realism', in *Sets Art*, New York 1986. See also J. Bowlt, 'Socialist Realism Then and Now', in J. Bowlt, *Russian Art 1875-1975*, Austin 1976.

nineteenth century, while trying to force Soviet industry into the twenty-first. This dual imperative of accelerating towards the future while reversing towards the past, naturally caused havoc with the Soviet sense of history. Moreover, by a strange by-product of this time warp, modernism in its Soviet form (constructivism, futurism, and so forth) began to recede into the distant past until, by the end of the Stalinist period of super-industrialization, it had become little more than a memory, almost a phantasm. However, because Stalinist industry was simply self-reproducing, building machines to build machines, and factories to build factories, and also increasingly inefficient compared to its Western model, it completely failed to improve the quality of life of its labour force (or even of its managing elite).<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the Fordist and futurist vision of the twenties avant-garde also appeared as mythic and even deluded, a kind of messianic utopianism.

After Stalin's death, there was a gallant attempt by some survivors to reconnect with the twenties. Ilya Ehrenburg, for instance, organized a Picasso exhibition and published his pointed and polemical memoirs. But this attempt to pick up the threads and begin again da capo could not dissolve the effect of the decades of intervening history, the experience of Stalinism and the cultural impoverishment and dislocation it had caused. The years of the 'thaw' were marked by cautious and prudent 'pluralization' of styles and approaches still under the rubric of 'Socialist Realism'. The field of permitted subject matter was 'bravely' expanded: 'One only has to recall what a stir [Plastov's] painting *Spring at the Bathhouse (The Old Village)* (1954) caused. The new pharisees were shocked by the nude motif.'<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, 'unofficial' artists began to experiment with expressionist, cubist, and abstract styles, cautiously hopeful about reform as they began to surface publicly in the 1960s, even imagining the possibility of some future convergence with 'official' art. These somewhat superficial hopes were, of course, crushed by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Komar & Melamid, along with Bulatov and Kabakov, belong to the next artistic generation. More pessimistic about reform, the problem that faced them was how to relocate themselves within a non-convergent Soviet history, how best to extricate themselves from the false dilemma of a choice between official art and dehistoricized neo-modernism. It was plain by then, after the post-'68 crackdown, that the prolonged succession crisis was much deeper than the reformist generation of the 'thaw' had imagined. It was necessary to move beyond Yevtushenko and Neizvestny, to confront the stabilized crisis in more radical terms, to re-engage with everyday life, which was equally remote both from the rhetoric of official art and from a neo-modernism irreparably robbed of its original utopian energy.

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<sup>6</sup> On the Soviet economy, see Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge, Mass 1966, and *Europe in the Russian Mirror*, Cambridge 1970. For a general survey, see Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR*, Harmondsworth 1969, new edn 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Quotation from Vladislav Zimenko, *The Hermasism of Art*, Moscow 1976

'We are children of Sots-realism [Socialist Realism] and grandchildren of the avant-garde.'<sup>8</sup> Thus Komar & Melamid later encapsulated their heritage. They wanted to confront Socialist Realism, the art in which they had been trained and which still surrounded them, not as a mere style but as an all-embracing ideological presence; not merely 'high art' but the pervasive public representation of the Soviet state itself; using, as their inheritance from the avant-garde, not the style of constructivism or suprematism but the stance of rejection and refusal, of alienation. Necessarily, this double acceptance and rejection of Socialist Realism led them towards an art of contradiction, juxtaposition and irony. The same paradoxical juxtaposition exists in different ways in the art of Bulatov and Kabakov: the project of using a false language against itself, in seeking to expose its gaps and elisions, in probing its limits, making it transparent. To a Western eye, this often seems like parody, but if so, it is parody of a serious kind, making 'virtue of necessity', as a Soviet friend of mine observed.

Though Sots art was named after pop art (and Sots-realism) by Komar & Melamid in Moscow in 1972,<sup>9</sup> its significance is very different. Pop art in the West emerged from an encounter with consumerism, a recognition that the barrier erected between 'high' and 'low' art could no longer be maintained. The successful Fordist economics of the West were predicated not simply on mass production, but on mass consumption as well, and artists increasingly lived in a visual environment dominated by the commodity and by commercial art. Soviet Fordism, or pseudo-Fordism (itself a gigantic parody) failed to develop a system of mass consumption. Instead, it delivered ideology, which filled the Soviet visual environment: political slogans, not advertising slogans; ideological emblems, not trademarks or logos; posters and banners, not billboards and ads; a cult of the Party, not of the commodity. These two visual (and textual) systems are analogous only in a surface sense. In the Soviet Union there was no fundamental difference between high and low art: each was part of the same totalizing system. But in contrast, pop art signalled the beginning of just such an integrated system, based on the generalized circulation of commodities and removing the barriers between commercial and fine art, whereas Sots art was an attempt to subvert an already established system from within.

In fact, it was precisely the failure to deliver consumer goods that led to the crisis of the Soviet state. As Platanov put it in his novel, *Kotlovan (The Pit)*, as summarized by Komar & Melamid: 'The revolution was over and people decided to build a tall building in a field, a socialist palace, where happy people would live. They began to dig a pit for the foundation, for the future, but as the work progressed, more and more people wanted to live in this house and take part in the work. The builders understood each day that the building would have to be bigger and, consequently, the pit should be even bigger and

<sup>8</sup> Komar & Melamid, *Death Poems*, Amsterdam 1988

<sup>9</sup> Margarita Tupitsyn, 'Sots Art: The Russian Deconstructive Force', in *Sots Art*.

deeper, since the bigger the building the larger its foundation should be. Thus, day after day, they did not rise upwards with the floors, but dug down deeper, into the earth.<sup>20</sup> The ideology of Socialist Realism continued to glorify the work and paint a picture of the future palace, but gradually the workers—and, of course, the overseers—came to realize that it was a fiction, that their leaders had no idea how to reach the future for which they were working and suffering.

The theme, or rather the climate, of post-utopianism pervades Soviet art today—the art, that is, of the post-'68 generation. The underlying mood of Komar & Melamid's work has always been elegiac. Their painting is full of ruins, of nostalgia, of memory, of a search for a usable past. It is painting suffused by a sense of entropy. From the start, the Russian intelligentsia was oriented towards the future, construed unproblematically as the elimination of the past. 'The past is no longer within our power,' wrote Chaadaev, the founding figure of the Russian intelligentsia, 'but the future depends on us... I have a profound conviction that we have a vocation to solve a great many of the problems of social order, to bring about the fulfilment of a great many of the ideas which have taken their rise in societies of the past, and to give an answer to questions of great importance with which mankind is concerned.'<sup>21</sup> Awareness of Russia's 'backwardness' found its compensation in an intense commitment to an idealized future.

Chaadaev's vision of Russia's role was given substance by the advent of socialist ideas in Russia. Socialism became the favoured version of a Westernized future for the Russian intelligentsia, numbers of whom, of course, eventually made the transition from populist socialism (*narodism*) to Marxism. In fact, Marxism, just like modernism, became an ideology of 'catching up with the West', a tendency exacerbated after the failure of revolution in the West itself had left Russia isolated and alone. Lenin and the Bolsheviks had argued that a German revolution would validate their decision to force history in backward Russia. Eventually, in the face of economic difficulties, Stalin would decide to force history even further and faster, desperately trying to close the gap between Russia and the West. As the Russian historian Gershenkron has argued, the more belated the industrialization, the more virulent the ideology accompanying and facilitating it: Manchester liberalism in England, Saint-Simonian socialism in France, Listian nationalism in Germany, Marxism in Russia—a Marxism which, as Gershenkron notes, cut adrift from Marx, ending up with the consolidation of Stalinism as 'the highly hybrid ideological concoction that went under the misnomer of Marxism.'<sup>22</sup>

The Stalin regime showed no concern for the traditional democratic, egalitarian and proletarian values of socialism. It was a coercive top-down system, characterized by enormous pay differentials and ruthless exploitation of the peasantry and the working class. It destroyed the Bolshevik Party and tried to obliterate every vestige of

<sup>20</sup> Komar & Melamid, *Death Poems*.

<sup>21</sup> Chaadaev cited in Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, New York 1948.

<sup>22</sup> Gershenkron, *Europe in the Russian Mirror*.

an autonomous intelligentsia. As Gerschenkron points out, it was like a nightmarish parody of the regime of Peter the Great, the westernizing tsar who instituted serfdom and consolidated absolutism in Russia. Thus it managed to combine a westernizing zeal with a traditional Russian despotism. For many post-Stalinist Russian intellectuals, one dimension of this concoction has been singled out for attack, and the contrasting one praised as its antidote. Thus, a resurgent nationalism and slavophilia has denounced Stalinism (and Leninism) as a poisoned fruit of the West, while a helter-skelter market liberalism calls for immediate, total westernization and an end to 'Asiatic statolatry and stagnation'. The dislocation of any sense of a coherent history (aggravated by Stalinism's own claim itself to be the science of history!) has given tragedy a desperate gloss of comedy.

In 1973, Komar & Melamid painted a large group portrait, *Meeting between Solzhenitsyn and Böll at Rastropovich's Country House*. Komar comments: 'You see, we have included in this painting everything that liberals in Moscow love, all you need for a good bourgeois life—a bowl of grapes, nice crystal glasses, a lemon with the peel hanging over the edge of the table. Like Dutch still-life painting of the seventeenth century. Most important, we have done everything in a different style—Cezanne's style, cubism, futurism. We painted Böll's left leg in the style of Russian icons.'<sup>13</sup> There is also a Socialist Realist heavy red curtain with a tassel and, over Solzhenitsyn's head, the sly suggestion of a pre-Petrine halo of gold mosaic. In fact, the painting presents an omnibus version of the paradoxically confused ideology of the Russian intelligentsia: the Stalinist remnant overhanging them, the fantasy of the plethora of the West, the echoes of a glorious national and sacred religious past. It combines two strategies which run throughout Komar & Melamid's career: the mixture of discordant styles and the mismatching of style to subject matter.

Two years later, in 1975, they painted a new series called *Scenes from the Future* in which architectural masterpieces of American modernism are depicted in ruins, using styles of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Thus, Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum, a tree growing up from the courtyard over the broken outer wall, is painted as a lonely ruin in a pastiche of Hubert Robert, an artist collected by Catherine the Great. With nostalgic irony, the West, in all its modernity, is inscribed into the pre-Romantic eighteenth-century vision of antiquity, favoured during the heyday of Russian absolutism. In a similar gesture conflating modernity with antiquity, they painted damaged and time-worn versions of a Warhol soup-can painting and a Lichtenstein comic-strip painting, as though they were now sustained and aged enough to be included in a Soviet museum as ancient artefacts. Thus American pop art itself was 'russified' by being seen retrospectively, in the remote past, rather than projected into an imaginary westernized future.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Komar cited in Ratcliff, *Komar & Melamid*.

<sup>14</sup> These two works formed part of a 'trilogy' whose third component was a series of sketches of Red Army soldiers in historic Western tourist spots—Paris, Florence, etc.

A little later, in 1975, Komar & Melamid painted a multi-panel *History of the USSR*, fifty-eight feet long (one for each year since October 1917). For this work, they used a modernist abstract style, in which each choice of colour, form and brushwork reflected the events and political climate of the appropriate period. Abstraction was thus harnessed to history painting and to allegory. This attempt to reclaim abstract painting by historicizing it was not simply another play with styles. On the contrary, it was part of a re-engagement with history painting, which demanded the development not of a single 'correct' style but of an experimental range of styles, each permitting a different mode of historical interpretation. The obsessive repainting of history to preserve it and to destroy it necessarily led Komar & Melamid to eclecticism, and hence to pastiche, to an 'Alexandrian' art of *stromata* and the *cento*.<sup>5</sup> But this protean nature of their work in Russia pre-dates their encounter with the turn of the West towards postmodernism. It reflects a very different background and a very different purpose. As Komar & Melamid shifted between abstract history painting, Sots art, and even the invention of work by imaginary painters of the Russian past, this was not a symptom of the end of modernism, but a sign of their engagement with the massive task of creating a new art from the rubble left behind by Stalinism.

When they arrived in New York they remained Russian painters, although of course their new environment forced them to revise their imaginary expectations of the West and consequently their understanding of its art. Emigration has been a frequent fate for Russian artists in this century: consider Kandinsky, Chagall, Larionov, Goncharova, Sonia Delaunay, the *Ballets Russes*, Stravinsky, and so on. Indeed, without this emigration Western art would hardly have been the same. It was the Russian artists of La Ruche and the Rotonde who provided the foot soldiers for the avant-garde, while Diaghilev became its most flamboyant impresario.<sup>6</sup> But, once again, we cannot expect to find a continuity between these two emigrations, pre- and post-Stalinist. In the interim the distinct histories of Russia and the West veered sharply apart, and the two could not easily be bridged. The seventies emigration occurred in circumstances very different from those of the twenties.

The problem that New York posed for Komar & Melamid was how to

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<sup>5</sup> Komar & Melamid, *Death Poems*. The chief work of Clement of Alexandria is "The *Stromata*" ("Rag Rugs"). The philosophy of the "*stromata*" is the compilation of brightly colored patches and scraps coming from something that was once a whole, forming a colorful mosaic depicting something new, that is virtually an esthetic type of thinking. In the culture of later antiquity "*centos*" were widespread—word mosaics ("*rugs*") depicting the events of Christian history through verses selected from various works of ancient authors. Christian temples were built using the maximum amount of elements and blocks from ancient temples.' Komar & Melamid's use of patchwork recalls Salman Rushdie's statements in his essay 'In Good Faith', *Newsweek*, 12 February 1990. '*The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Melange, hotch-potch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world.'

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth E. Silver and Romy Golan, eds., *The Circle of Menipharma*, New York 1985; and Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, New York 1989.

escape the omnivorous maw of postmodernism. Their experience of the Manhattan art world sharpened their distrust of modernism, which had become the 'official' art of the United States. But, as I interpret it, the divorce of modernism from its role as an avant-garde, which was a precondition for its 'triumph', also led to its rapid dissolution. From the sixties on, it no longer functioned as a heroic quest, in the way in which Greenberg had programmed and promoted it. Instead, it disintegrated into a competing plethora of neo-styles and mini-movements feeding off the heroic past. After the turbulence of the 1968 period, when there was a limited secession from the dealer-museum system, there was a rapid institutionalization of the new phase of modernism, under the rubric of postmodernism.<sup>17</sup> This development had some positive aspects—the new pluralism permitted a revival of figurative painting, for instance—but its impetus still remained intrinsically formalist and reflexive. Postmodernism was to be defined as 'art about art', not in the modernist sense of ontological self-examination and research, the testing and probing of the foundations of painting, but in the new sense of citation, translation, deconstruction and neo-classicism.

The strategies Komar & Melamid brought with them could easily be assimilated into the conceptual field of postmodernism. Their use of pastiche and parody, their doctrine of 'anarchic eclecticism', their diaristic polyptychs could all be glossed as signs of a new postmodern variant, albeit with an exotic 'Russian' feeling for kitsch. Strangely enough, the most serious of artists, in the Russian tradition of the intelligentsia, began to seem less than serious, seen through the remorselessly frivolous spectacles of the Manhattan art world! For Komar & Melamid, Socialist Realism might be kitsch, but it was kitsch that carried the weight of fifty years of Russian history, and its reworking can hardly be dismissed superficially as comedy.<sup>18</sup> New York's absorption in the 'flux of temporal values', as Perry Anderson put it, in the insatiable search for the new, 'defined simply as what comes later',<sup>19</sup> ran completely counter to the fundamentally historical nature of their project.

### Exodus to Bayonne

In 1988, they finally made a decisive move away from the 'nostalgic Socialist Realism' and transplanted Sots art which had dominated the first decade of their stay in New York. They began to work in Bayonne, New Jersey, on a project based at the Bergen Point Brass Foundry, a small factory dating from the 1890s. Bayonne is an industrial town, the terminus for the Standard Oil (now Exxon) pipeline. The first refinery was built in 1875 and Bayonne is still dominated by massive tank farms, oil and chemical installations, and tanker berths. As the 1939 WPA guide put it, 'pollution from gasoline

<sup>17</sup> Komar & Melamid, *Death Poems*. 'If modernism can be compared to an intellectual adventure, the discovery of new lands, then post-modernism reminds one of tourism.'

<sup>18</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Painting History', in *Komar & Melamid*, Edinburgh 1985.

<sup>19</sup> Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and Revolution', *NLR* 144, March–April 1984, pp 96–113.



products, at first, generally dumped into the bay, spoiled swimming and fishing.<sup>20</sup> Last year, despite cleanup measures, there was a massive oil spill in the channel that separates Bayonne from Staten Island. The WPA thumbnail history of the town principally records spectacular fires and desperate strikes 'that left a heavy toll of dead and wounded among the employees'. The town is tightly packed on a narrow peninsula with water on three sides. It is filled with saloons, churches, garden shrines and discount stores ('Rock Bottom', 'Price Tag'). Culturally conservative and isolated from New York, fifty years later it still retains the feeling of 'a workingman's city, and its localized industries are attuned to this basic fact; so also are its recreations and its civic life.' In a word, Bayonne epitomizes the rustbelt.

It was precisely these qualities that attracted Komar & Melamid to Bayonne. They compare their exodus to Bayonne to the movement of painters from Paris to Barbizon in the Forest of Fontainebleau. Starting in 1847, in conjunction with the first *Salon Indépendant*, democratic artists began to move out of the city, rent rooms around the village of Barbizon, and set up studios in barns. Théodore Rousseau (*Le Grand Refuse*), the instigator of the move, was joined by other artists, the best known of whom was J.F. Millet, who lived there until his death twenty-seven years later. Daumier visited and is remembered holding forth 'in Rabelaisian vein'.<sup>21</sup> The exodus was, of course, in protest against the Salon, the Institute and the Academy, against the corrupt atmosphere of the capital. It is ironic that Komar & Melamid should have first turned their thoughts to New Jersey from admiration of the garish sunsets they saw diffracted through the corrupt atmosphere of the industrial, rather than rural, hinterland, and set out there in search of spiritually clean air.

William Empson began his classic *Some Versions of Pastoral* with a chapter on 'Proletarian Literature', seeing there a yearning for a lost dignity, beauty and pathos.<sup>22</sup> Here, perhaps, is the connection between Bayonne and Barbizon, between the foundry workers of New Jersey and the peasants celebrated by Millet. This is a complex 'rustbelt pastoralism' which also, of course, contains an element of nostalgia for Russia. In their pen-portrait of Bayonne, Komar & Melamid comment on the sound of vesper bells (doubtless from the Church of St Peter and St Paul) and the 'bittersweet aroma' of wormwood, bringing back memories from their Moscow childhood. These are the same elements that appear in their autobiography of the fictional peasant painter Nikolai Buchomov (1929, Buslaevsk, Penze; Moscow 1973): 'I only remember the sharp odour of wormwood, its smell mixed up with something sweet and good.'<sup>23</sup> Compare the 'elusive

<sup>20</sup> Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of New Jersey, *New Jersey*, New York 1939.

<sup>21</sup> John Sillevs, 'The Barbizon School', in John Sillevs and Hans Kraan, eds., *The Barbizon School*, The Hague 1985; and Jean Bouret, *The Barbizon School and 19th-Century French Landscape Painting*, Greenwich 1973, which cites Alfred Sensier on Daumier's visit to Barbizon.

<sup>22</sup> William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, Norfolk 1935.

<sup>23</sup> Ratcliff, *Komar & Melamid*

fragrance of wormwood' which now 'rises up to mingle with the bouquet of chemical emissions' (Bayonne 1989).<sup>24</sup> Plainly this is a version of pastoralism enriched by personal nostalgia, but also, perhaps for that very reason, corroded by irony. Yet, at some level, the black foundry workers of Bayonne echo the muzhik proletarians of Russia, liberated from slavery and serfdom only to enter the heat and glare of the furnace.

There is a curious similarity between Komar & Melamid's description of the Bergen Point Foundry: 'While the slanting rays of the sun slice randomly through the lamp-like building, the workers, clad in protective helmets, gloves and aprons reaching down to the floor, move about the foundry fire as if in some ritual dance, pouring out the liquid sun and fashioning it for human needs: drainage faucets, pipes, sewer valves',<sup>25</sup> and Empson's evocation of the Spanish workers he watched 'tread out sherry grapes and squeeze out the skins afterwards, which involves dance steps with a complicated rhythm. I said what was obvious, that this was like the Russian ballet, and . . . [they] showed us the other dance step used in a neighbouring district; both ways were pleasant in themselves and the efficient way to get the maximum juice.'<sup>26</sup> Empson's pastoral through English eyes, though, is straight, whereas Komar & Melamid undercut theirs with a final note of irony. Yet, not only irony, but also an invocation, once again, of decay, effluence, entropy.

It is interesting to compare Komar & Melamid's Bayonne work with Robert Smithson's New Jersey pieces, *The Monuments of Passaic* (1967) and, of course, the *Nonsite 'Line of Wreckage', Bayonne, New Jersey* (1968).<sup>27</sup> Smithson was born and raised in New Jersey. He saw Passaic, his birthplace, as existing 'without a rational past and without the "big events" of history. Oh, maybe there are a few statues, a legend, a couple of curios, but no past—just what passes for the future. A Utopia minus a bottom, a place where the machines are idle, and the sun has turned to glass.' It was a place full of 'the memory-traces of an abandoned set of futures'. For *Nonsite 'Line of Wreckage'*, Smithson took pieces of asphalt-coated concrete rubble from a landfill near an old ship graveyard, where the hulks are still rotting today. This same landfill is now covered with wormwood: 'Ah wormwood, eternal grass of industrial dumps!'<sup>28</sup> The same year, Smithson observed that 'the more I think about steel itself, devoid of the technological refinements, the more rust becomes the fundamental property of steel . . . In the technological mind rust evokes a fear of disuse, inactivity, entropy and ruin. Why steel is valued over rust, is a

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<sup>24</sup> Komar & Melamid, 'We ♥ New Jersey', *Artforum*, New York 1989

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*

<sup>27</sup> Robert Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, Ithaca 1981. Smithson's own writings are collected in Robert Smithson, *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, New York 1979. See especially 'The Monuments of Passaic', first published in *Artforum*, December 1967, and 'Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape', first published in *Artforum*, February 1973. I am grateful to John Welchman for drawing my attention to these texts.

<sup>28</sup> Komar & Melamid, 'We ♥ New Jersey'.

technological value, not an artistic one.<sup>29</sup> Like Smithson, Komar & Melamid transported industrial debris into the gallery to make a 'Bayonne Rock Garden'. Now they are painting on rusted steel, rather than canvas, leaving sheets of metal out in the rain until it acquires the desired reddish-yellow coating.

Yet, despite these parallels, there are significant differences between Smithson and Komar & Melamid. Not only does their work contain human beings—portraits of foundry workers, studies of heads and hands—but it is oriented more to the sublime than to the picturesque. Komar & Melamid's vision of Bayonne has a melancholy grandeur: it is bathed in the glow of furnace and sunset. The furnace is the forge of Hephaistos and Vulcan. The art-historical echoes are of *An Iron Forge* by Wright of Derby, or J.M.W. Turner's *The Limekiln at Coalbrookdale*.<sup>30</sup> Smithson, in contrast, saw himself as a revivalist of the picturesque, mediated to him through Olmsted (who designed the public park in Bayonne), a picturesque which would heal the wounds inflicted on nature, restoring 'the democratic dialectic between the sylvan and the industrial',<sup>31</sup> the terror exorcized.

### The Dialectic of Rust and Paint

As you drive through the tank farms of Bayonne, you can see the dialectic of rust and paint, the rust breaking through the paint, to form patterns 'like a Clyfford Styll', then being painted over again by the agents of modernity, ever vigilant in their battle against entropy. Ruins are the monuments of human failure. This endless process of degeneration, this struggle of art against time, is a constant preoccupation. They write: 'Restorers commit crimes. Artists mixed transparent colours with varnish, then a restorer will remove the varnish and take the colour with it . . . They don't just remove paint. They paint in a new style. Absolutely. They invent an image of the past, a contemporary image.'<sup>32</sup> Indefatigable entropy is found also in the movement of human history, in the attempt of utopianism to abolish the past, to live instantly in the future. Both Western modernism and Russian Stalinism were projects that demanded a denial of the past, a constant movement towards an ideal future. But the past cannot be denied. Like the repressed, it always returns, and when it is foreclosed (as Lacan noted) it returns in the form of madness.<sup>33</sup>

It is against this sombre background that Komar & Melamid's

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<sup>29</sup> 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects', in Smithson, *Writings*.

<sup>30</sup> Francis D. Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, Chatham 1947.

<sup>31</sup> Smithson, 'Frederick Law Olmsted', in Smithson, *Writings*.

<sup>32</sup> Ratcliff, *Komar & Melamid*.

<sup>33</sup> The French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, used the term 'foreclosure' in order to pinpoint the difference between neurosis and psychosis. Whereas neurosis derives from repression, from the transfer of symbolic value and meaning from a repressed memory, displacing it into a symptom, psychosis (such as paranoia or schizophrenia) derives from a fundamental failure to symbolize, which leaves a yawning gap in the fabric of language and memory. While it is dangerous to draw analogies between individual and social pathology, it seems plain that Soviet culture suffers from a general disturbance of the collective memory, from agonizing cultural gaps and voids.

penchant for parody and irony should be seen. It is a device, a way of combatting the sense of tragedy. They quote Kierkegaard: 'In irony, the subject is negatively free, free from the shackles which in reality restrain him so firmly.' Irony provides a provisional release from tragedy. At the same time it eats away at rhetoric, hypocrisy and idealization. It corrodes myths, old and new. In his brilliant and path-breaking essay from the late fifties, 'On Socialist Realism', Sinyavsky wrote that 'irony is the laughter of the superfluous man who derides himself and everything sacred in this world. Irony is the faithful companion of unbelief and doubt: it vanishes as soon as there appears a faith that does not tolerate sacrilege'<sup>34</sup>—whether, it might be added, that faith is in Stalinism, Old Russia or free-market westernization. Irony may provide only a 'negative freedom', yet this peculiarly 'accursed' Russian irony, this 'disorder of the soul', as Blok put it in 1907,<sup>35</sup> is still the only passage out from an epoch of half measures and half-truths, from a present mortgaged to an imaginary future and a future dragged back by the weight of the past. There are no new miracles or new truths to be spun out of new dreams and new delusions. It is better to start the future over with the wormwood and the rust.

<sup>34</sup> 'Abram Tertz' (Andrei Sinyavsky), *The Trial Begins* and *On Socialist Realism*, Berkeley 1960

<sup>35</sup> Blok's *Irony* (1908) is cited in Sinyavsky.

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## *Whose Left? Socialism, Feminism and the Future*

Political generations appear and disappear with astonishing speed.\* Thirty years ago, a budding anarchist and sixties student radical, I shared with certain others of my generation and class a politics of generalized anti-authoritarianism and free love. In Australia at the time, coming out of the rigid conformity of the Cold War, such a politics was not as vapid as it sounds today. The Communist Party was banned outright, along with James Joyce, James Baldwin, and any sex at all that dared to speak its name. Non-white people were denied entry into Australia, black Australians were denied legal rights, even the right to vote, and devotion to monarchy, marriage and hyper-hypocrisy remained our sacred birthright. We read Reich, Nomad and Bakunin, remaining oddly innocent of any more solid socialist tradition.

Ten years later, student anarchism quickly transformed itself into the more class-oriented, anti-imperialist libertarian socialism of the seventies. In Britain now, I joined those attempting to win 'Power for the People' on the streets of London, in the local struggles of the day. And, just in time—as a single parent and comical colonial relic—I discovered women's liberation, then closely linked in with alternative or libertarian socialism.

Two decades on again, and it is hard indeed for socialist and movement activists of the sixties and seventies to contemplate the passing of our own one and only (and the Left's hopefully more cyclical) hey-day. Today, depression, cynicism or political turnabouts are hard to avoid, even knowing we are not the first—and will not be the last—to face the defeat and disorderly retreat of the ideals, activities and lifestyles that transformed and gave meaning to our lives. Depression hits hardest when the withering of former struggles and aspirations begins to feel like personal defeat; often ending the friendships, the shared activities and the opening up of public spaces, so necessary for the survival of any sense of optimism in the future. The excitement of

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\* This article is an expanded version of a talk delivered to the Radical Philosophy Conference, *Values, Resistance and Social Change*, at the Polytechnic of Central London, in November 1990.

believing in the possibility of collective action for change has been replaced by the gloom of witnessing the erasure of the history of such struggles: an erasure which stems not only from the mainstream media, but from sections of the Left as well, busy exchanging new ideas for old, or else recoiling memoryless from the corpse of Soviet socialism.

### Libertarian Socialism

Yet for over three and a half decades most Western socialists had batted not only against the destructive consequences of capitalist development, but also against Stalinism and the stifling, authoritarian regimes of Soviet-style state or bureaucratic socialism. And now, just when in Britain more people seem a little more aware again of some of the problems accompanying the inequalities tolerated, indeed promoted, by the unregulated free market of Thatcherism—if only to welcome the minor shift to Major—and just when, in the East, Stalinism is finally in irreversible retreat, those who worked hardest and longest for a more democratic socialism seem most silenced. Ten years of defeat for almost all egalitarian and collectivist endeavours has caused many of us on the left to fall into chronic mutual abuse, to fall upon our own swords, or to fall—some never to rise again—onto the analytic couch.

The resounding victory for the conservative alliance in East Germany, the one country of the Soviet bloc which appeared to have a democratic left opposition in New Forum, has been registered by many across the political spectrum as the proof that socialism of any kind will never have popular appeal. In fact, New Forum, a heterogeneous alliance of peace, environmental and human-rights activists under the umbrella of the Church, was never itself organized as a *political*, let alone a *socialist*, opposition. Its recent dramatic rise and fall tells us much about the extreme isolation of dissident intellectuals in East Germany, as well as the effectiveness of four decades of Stalinist rule in massively discrediting and impoverishing both socialist *and* democratic ideals and values.

What inspired the upsurge of Western radicalism in the sixties, which in turn spawned the feminist and other movements of the seventies, was never, in any case, 'actually existing socialism'. Every type of anarchist, dreamer, utopian, syndicalist, Trotskyist, pacifist, revolutionary, reformist and third roader appeared in the radical metropolitan scene at that time, but one rarely encountered a Stalinist, a command-economy 'socialist', the creature whose aspirations and beliefs today apparently typify 'socialism' itself. Although we were all aware of their existence. Anti-Stalinism was our common home, the place from which we all began, the air we breathed. The 'Party' member was, and remains to me, something of a puzzle: critical of Soviet societies, committed to democratic transition, but until recently (before some, like Gorbachev, swung over to become apparently uncritical allies of the market) still prepared to defend the obviously bleak and authoritarian, undemocratic Soviet regimes. The Leninist and social-democratic Left *shared* the belief that their own parties

(despite mirroring existing race, gender and, in the main, class hierarchies) could be trusted to administer a centralized state in the interests of all working people and their dependents: the former after the revolution, and the latter on election.

It was precisely these vanguardist and bureaucratic beliefs, precisely these hierarchical and centralized structures, that were *rejected* by New Left writers like E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall from the late fifties, as well as by the emerging social movements from the late sixties—the largest and most influential, of course, being the women's liberation movement. They sought instead more devolved and participatory structures of organization and practice, which could empower people in their communities and workplaces. In one sizable segment of the independent or non-aligned Left that flourished in Britain in the 1970s, influenced by and often overlapping with the women's movement and other liberation struggles, 'democracy'—today's 'new' buzz-word—was fetishized: steering committees had to rotate regularly, skills had to be shared to prevent the growth of bureaucracy, committees sought equal representation of women and men, and discussion endlessly picked over the problem of the under-representation of Black, working-class and other subordinated groups. Indeed, if anything, the lack of commitment to working out types of viable and responsive centralized economic planning—today's new bogey word—or to building national structures capable of providing long-term support for grass-roots initiatives, was the problem for this part of the Left. The socialist case for some form of public ownership remains as strong as ever, if only because, despite the failures of the past, it alone provides the greatest possibilities for using resources and labour in ways which are more egalitarian, innovative and supportive.

The participatory democratic ideals of the libertarian Left never had a mass appeal, but they did play a critical role in grass-roots agitation over the most diverse array of popular needs and interests throughout the 1970s. Whether campaigning around single issues, foregoing careers to establish local information and resource centres, creating housing or workplace cooperatives, attempting to change local or national state policies, or supporting international struggles, the problems of that Left were many. But they were not those of adopting coercive, bureaucratic or economistic ideas and practices. Even though goals often bore slight relation to achievements, they were not those of ignorance of or unconcern about male-domination, class privilege, racism, homophobia or other forms of invalidation and exclusion long associated with more traditional labour-movement and left party politics.

By the close of the seventies, this Left, which had widened its own socialist agendas to include personal relations and social identities, was facing increasing problems building support and maintaining optimism against the combined obstacles fast overwhelming it: economic recession and the Right in power. It was the growing difficulties of finding strategies to overcome fragmentation and of forming new alliances that were to lead many into closer engagement with the

machinery of local government and other mainstream institutions in the 1980s, moving outside the demoralization of dwindling autonomous bases for jobs or other forms of contact inside the state or perhaps trade-union structures. These internal weaknesses in libertarian socialism, which contributed to its inability to withstand Thatcher, need to be studied. But what we have seen instead—for example in the 'new' politics of *Marxism Today*—is merely the removal of its innovations and influences (full recognition of autonomous groups, multiple sites of oppression, rejection of vanguardism and authoritarianism) from the messy terrain of political engagement into the calmer waters and cosier spaces of cultural studies.

### A Wilful, Deliberate Forgetting

'With the onset of economic recession the libertarian Left died out in the early 1980s', Jonathan Rutherford declares in his introduction to the latest Lawrence and Wishart collection of essays, *Identity*.<sup>1</sup> But Rutherford's burial of this particular socialist tradition is premature, indeed illustrative of the very problem it faced. The early to mid eighties actually saw a resurgence of alternative left ideas, still committed to creating structures and resources for grass-roots democracy and the recognition of the diversity of subordinated groups, finally beginning to influence the mainstream Left of the Labour Party and labour movement. It would be foolish to ignore the problems or exaggerate the significance of the burst of creativity and democratic and egalitarian hopes raised when, for example, the Labour Left took control of the GLC in 1981 and opened its doors for direct discussion with Black and women's groups, trade unionists or housing cooperatives, seeking to channel institutional power and resources into marginalized and disadvantaged sectors organizing on their own behalf. But it is even more foolish to 'forget', within a few short years, that such attempts were made. A wilful, deliberate forgetting.

The GLC's economic-policy unit under Robin Murray was, ironically, the first to theorize post-Fordism in Britain, as it ambitiously set out to find ways of encouraging viable alternative forms of industrial production which might, though adopting more human, creative and egalitarian employment practices, nevertheless survive the rigours of multinational competition. We cannot assess the ultimate fate of these initiatives, as within a few short years the GLC and its policy units were closed down. By the mid 1980s Thatcher's generals, having provoked and defeated every trade-union struggle since their election, knew just where next to direct their fire. Ignoring overwhelming opposition and the widespread personal popularity of Ken Livingstone, Thatcher first abolished the GLC and other metropolitan councils outright, and then launched one attack after another on the capacity of local government to provide any focus or hope for popular resistance.

Yet throughout most of the 1980s, right up until the third Thatcher

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Rutherford, 'A Place Called Home', in J. Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, London 1990, p. 14



victory in 1987 (and in pockets still today), more libertarian, less bureaucratic ideas kept emerging in the new terrain of local government and in women's and other sections of the trade unions, which, *significantly*, effected official recognition of issues of racism, sexism, harassment, abuse and other forms of specific discrimination, while for a time at least providing some focus for creative if conflict-ridden interaction with political activists—whether Black, feminist, or collective consumer campaigners. But these developments were also to highlight some of the weaknesses which can follow from commitment to notions of the absolute autonomy of each oppressed group to organize itself and assert its own needs and identity. Splits and hostilities rapidly appear, often demoralizing if not immobilizing the pursuit of political ends, as one group competes against another, claiming the mantle of the most oppressed.

Incessant problems spring to life when attempting to rethink our concepts of democracy in practice, attempting to move beyond the limitations of either representative democracy or purely individual understandings of rights, towards the dismantling of inequalities. But rather than assessing such problems in practice, this politics of autonomy has been adapted for the 'New Times' outlined in *Maoism Today*, and re-theorized, as though quite new, to become the politics of 'identity' or (confusingly displaying its deep ambivalence) of 'difference'. But old songs resung by different bards, now more removed from sites of political engagement, will not overcome the rifts arising when autonomy becomes fragmentation, and the mere affirmation of difference replaces strategic thought—whatever the hopeful appeal to the thinking of Laclau and Mouffe who suggest we may call upon some conceptual 'chain of equivalence' between different identities.<sup>2</sup>

### Identity Politics, Feminism and 'Difference' Theory

The problem is that social identities are not necessarily or even desirably political identities.<sup>3</sup> Nothing illustrates this better than the pains and perils of contemporary feminism. We may wish to celebrate our lives as women, but be desperately seeking to cast aside the bewitching female romance of virtue and maternal connectedness: the identity of woman as we have known it, and attempted, so hazardously, to live it. No clear political strategies follow from our either embracing or rejecting a gendered identity as such. In the name of women's specific needs and interests, women have fought progressively for peace and public welfare. But they have also at times made 'cowards' of reluctant warriors, and opposed women's professional, creative and employment prospects. In the name of shared human rights, women have fought tenaciously against exclusion from the economic, political and cultural citadels men dominate. But this may also invalidate the

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Chantal Mouffe, 'Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy?' *Socialist Review*, vol. 90, no. 2, 1990, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> For a useful exposition and critique of the thinking of Laclau and Mouffe along these lines, see Peter Osborne, 'Radicalism Without Limit?: Discourse, Democracy and the Politics of Identity', in P. Osborne, ed., *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism*, Verso, London, forthcoming 1991.

significance of interdependence and community, a reality that can weigh so heavily upon the backs of women.

Pointing out the inevitability of women's oscillation around their gendered identities, and the need to embrace rather than reject or attempt to transcend its multiple contradictions, US feminist Ann Snitow points out: 'The urgent contradiction women constantly experience between the pressure to be a woman and the pressure not to be one will change only through a historical process; it cannot be dissolved through thought alone.'<sup>4</sup> Yet feminism has torn itself apart over the recurring divisions between those who stress the similarities and those, increasing in number and influence since the late 1970s, who stress the differences between women and men.<sup>5</sup> As constructed within contemporary feminism, the former have tended to pursue strategies for equality and power sharing, the latter to assert the significance of 'maternal' ways to celebrate 'female' pleasures and to denounce and seek protection from 'male' violence and abuse. But outside feminist thought, women have stressed either similarity or difference with quite other objectives in mind: perhaps to assert similarity in constructing a shared superiority over 'inferior breeds', perhaps to stress gender difference in deference to the word of God the Father, or in the service of more mortal *Führers*.

The point is that identities do not spring directly from gender, class, race or ethnic position, or from sexual, religious or any other particular orientation, so much as from a sense of belonging to specific social and historical milieux. The strength and confirmation that context can offer, and the currently unfashionable consideration of its political orientation on the Left/Right divide, will determine whether the contemporary Western proliferation of identities offers new forms of resistance, or conservative retrenchments in the face of change.

Within feminism, these conflicts and the extent to which gender similarities or differences have been the focus of debate, are not unconnected to feminism's declining relationship to socialism from the close of the seventies, which in turn is not unconnected to the declining fate of socialism itself. Little more than a decade ago many feminists who were also socialists still believed (despite the difficulties of working with the traditional Left and the labour movement) that what was important and distinctive about our politics was its capacity to change and enrich male-centred socialist agendas and theories to include women's experience, personal life and cultural politics, alongside the interests of all oppressed groups. Today, with the Left itself battling to survive a cold destructive climate, more would agree with the North American feminist Zillah Eisenstein, a leading theoretician of socialist feminism in the USA in the 1970s, who recently declared—adapting to what she sees as new realities, rather than expressing

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Snitow, 'A Gender Diary', in M. Hirsch and E. Fox Keller, eds., *Conflicts in Feminism*, New York 1990, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> For a fuller exploration of the developments of these conflicts in British and North American feminism over the last two decades, see Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female. Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*, London 1987.

anger or sectarian sentiment—that 'the specification of feminism as socialist has little *political* context today.'<sup>6</sup> Socialism, she feels, seems to hold out little promise for women, and the radical edge of feminism is now to be maintained through a focus on 'the particularities of women's lives'. In agreement with those known as 'difference theorists', Eisenstein now argues that it is in their specific identity as women that feminists should seek a politics which unites all women through the assertion and revaluing of our experience of 'difference'.

Illustrating her argument, Eisenstein cites the feminist struggle over reproductive rights: 'the starting point for theory and politics here is *both* the individual (her specificity) and her right to reproductive freedom (which is universal).'<sup>7</sup> But, despite the importance of the issue of abortion, this is a less than convincing strategy for a common political struggle to unite all women. Nothing, in fact, so *polarizes* women, including a small number of women who call themselves feminists, as the issue of abortion: the main and ferocious opponents of women's abortion rights in the West are other women. They fight their battle—blowing up clinics and terrorizing pregnant women—expressly in defence of women's specificity, women's difference (backed, of course, by the Catholic Church, and other forces of the Moral Right).

It is precisely the issues arising from what is most distinctively female that today most dramatically *divide* rather than unite feminists fighting for women's interests. Feminists stressing 'difference' unsurprisingly emphasize the female body, sexuality and human reproduction (or, in the more sophisticated versions of 'French feminism', the unconscious and psychic meanings attaching themselves to the female body and maternal experience). Yet it is easier for women to unite over demands on the economic front than it is for women to unite around sexuality and the meanings of the female body. While many feminists now give most of their time and energy to combatting 'pornographic' representations of sexuality and the female body as the root of women's oppression, others battle against what they see as sex-negative positions on pornography (or erotica) which threaten to enclose women anew in repressive, patriarchal fictions of female virtue.<sup>8</sup>

That there is such fierce disagreement over what many see as the bed-rock of feminism is not so surprising. At least it is not so surprising once we recognize the complexities at the heart of all talk about 'identities'. We can never stress enough, it seems to me, that both 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are always more complex and nuanced than any

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<sup>6</sup> Zillah Eisenstein, 'Specifying us Feminism in the 1990s: The Problem of Naming', *Socialist Review*, vol. 90, no. 2, 1990, p. 48 (emphasis in original).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> See Ann Ferguson, 'Sex War: The debate between Radical and Libertarian Feminists', *Signs* 10, 1984, Estelle Freedman and Barrie Thorne, 'Introduction to the Feminist Sexuality Debates', *Signs* 10, 1984, Carol Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger. Exploring Female Sexuality*, London 1984; Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified. Discourses on Life and Law*, Cambridge, Mass. 1987, G. Chester and J. Dickey, eds., *Feminism and Censorship*, London 1988.

cultural symbolism can register.<sup>9</sup> That which at one minute we may wish to embrace, in defiance of shared oppression, we may, at the next, wish to discard as trapping us within traditional cultural discourses, institutions and practices. The celebration of female specificity makes use of the existing structures of meaning that establish sexual difference, which as feminists we also need to contest, even when we try to invert the existing androcentric system of values that accompany such difference. Women as women, however oppressed, do not necessarily adopt oppositional identities. Indeed, the reverse is more likely. This paradox of difference theory for feminists is shared, I believe, by any politics of identity, as divisions inevitably proliferate both inside and around the assertion of any specific identity.

### Does Feminism Need Socialism?

It is certainly true that twenty years of feminism has *failed* to improve the economic and social position of all women, although it has brought many gains for some. This is as true in Britain as in most other Western countries. But nowhere is it quite so clear, nowhere are the contrasts between the lives of women after twenty years of feminism quite so stark, or the conflicts within feminism and their declining relationship to socialism quite so dramatic, as in the United States. The USA best illustrates the problems around feminism, identity politics and the Left.

Despite the existence of the largest, most influential and vociferous feminist movement in the world, it is US women who have seen least *overall* change in the relative disadvantages of their sex, compared to other Western democracies. As Barbara Ehrenreich illustrates, within the professional middle class, women have made huge gains, increasing their representation among the most prestigious and lucrative professions by 300 to 400 per cent within a decade.<sup>10</sup> They have also cracked open the corporate business world, in which 30 per cent of managerial employees are now women, while Masters' graduates from business school jumped from 4.9 per cent in 1973 to 40 per cent by 1986.<sup>11</sup> But outside the professional middle class, the situation for many women has been one of frustration, defeat and, for a significant number, increasing misery.

The first big defeat for the women's movement in the USA came in 1977 when the initial Hyde amendment was passed and Medicaid abortion was withdrawn, just four years after the right to abortion, affordable for women of all classes, had been won. The next, deeply symbolic defeat, ensuring frustration and retrenchment for feminist organizers and activists throughout the USA, came with the dismantling

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<sup>9</sup> This is the theme of my latest book, *Slow Motion. Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, London 1990. Snitow has asked, pertinently, referring to some feminists' fear that seeking gender equality will lead only to women becoming more like men, 'are we perhaps quite close to men already at the moment when we fear absorption into the other?' Snitow, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling. The Inner Life of the Middle Class*, New York 1989, p. 217.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Worst Years of Our Lives*, New York 1990, p. 164.

of the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment), exactly ten years after its resounding success when passed in 1972. Meanwhile, and connected with the defeat of ERA (as women of the New Right like Phyllis Schlafly mobilized around the slogan 'STOP ERA'), the Reagan decade of the 1980s had ushered in massive welfare cuts and steep increases in poverty—especially among black and ethnic-minority women and men. More women, particularly women raising children on their own, were not only poorer than women of their class and race had been twenty years earlier, but their poverty, with new spending cuts, became the more disabling. (They now battle to survive and raise children in an environment where, it is said, more people have been murdered in the streets of New York in the last fifteen years than Americans died in the Vietnam war.<sup>12</sup>)

In this time of triumphal victory for the Right, some formerly self-declared feminists, like Sylvia Ann Hewlett, have drawn massive media attention by blaming feminism for the current plight of so many women in the USA. Feminism failed to protect women who are mothers, she accuses; claiming, falsely, that it never made demands of the state around child care and welfare.<sup>13</sup> Hewlett now opposes all equal-rights legislation in favour of an exclusive focus on child-care support for women. But her argument that it is women, and women alone, who in the end perform all the labour of caring is itself a capitulation to the very cornerstone of conservative thinking: the thinking that has overseen the deterioration in the lives of the poor, rewarded the rich, and—with its traditional family rhetoric and judicial removal of relevant funding—fought till it has all but smashed the seventies' feminist vision of moving beyond existing gendered conceptions of 'public' and 'private' to a world where nurturing and instrumental tasks could be mutually shared by women and men.

The growing immiseration of the US poor was not a product of the failure of feminist equal-rights and affirmative-action programmes for women; indeed many succeeded. It resulted rather from the now historic weakness of the US labour movement in protecting either male or female workers' rights, or winning any comprehensive welfare system.<sup>14</sup> From its already battered and shrunken state in the early 1950s (around 30 per cent), after direct attacks from both corporate capital and the state, trade-union membership declined calamitously in the USA, down to its current 17 per cent. And, as research like that of Pippa Norris and others indicates, political parties and the level of trade unionism do seem to matter in assessing women's relative disadvantages compared to men. In countries where there have been longer periods of social-democratic government and stronger trade unions, there is far less pay-differential and occupational segregation (both vertical and horizontal) between women and men, and far greater expansion of welfare services. In Sweden, that familiar example in

<sup>12</sup> See Kate Soper, *Troubled Pleasures: Writings on Politics, Gender and Hedonism*, London 1990, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *A Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America*, New York 1986.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, David Ploder, 'What's So New About New Social Movements?', *Socialist Review*, vol. 90, no. 1, 1990.

many ways similar to other Scandinavian countries, where the Social Democratic Party has been in government since the 1920s and trade unionism in both the public and private sector is around 90 per cent, we find the highest levels of welfare spending and the lowest discrepancy between women and men's wages (women's wages are around 87 per cent of men's).<sup>5</sup>

Given that the USA is the *only* major Western democracy where women have failed to improve their wages at all relative to men's over the last two decades (remaining at 59 per cent of men's hourly wage, compared to Britain's 69 per cent), and given the favourable contrasts between the Scandinavian countries and the USA regarding child-care facilities and other welfare benefits (again, Britain comes somewhere in between), as well as women's proportionately far higher representation in parliament, it seems strange for feminists to ignore the traditional objectives of socialist or social-democratic parties and organized labour in their search for feminist goals and strategies, whatever their limitations and weaknesses, and however much their successes have depended on the hard and difficult slog of women within them. At a time when the advances made by some women are so clearly overshadowed by the increasing poverty experienced so acutely by others (alongside the unemployment of the men of their class and group), it seems perverse to pose women's specific interests *against* rather than *alongside* more traditional socialist goals.<sup>6</sup>

The question is whether, as so many now feel and Eisenstein expresses, 'socialism seems to hold out little new theoretical or political promise for feminism'.<sup>7</sup> The answer, I suggest, depends upon where you look, and whether you allow what has been the most creative and dynamic rethinking on the Left to be forgotten, or perhaps resuscitated as flimsier new fashions eager to flaunt their distance from what remains of the theoretical and organizational strengths of the 'old' (New) Left and labour movement. Today's critics who would say goodbye to socialism for a politics which recognizes 'the centrality of difference' usually reject as inevitably oppressive the 'totalizations' of *any* socialist project in the name of the 'irreducible plurality and indeterminacy' of the social. Yet the force of their argument (esoteric philosophical confusions aside) comes from what should by now be *familiar* criticisms of Leninist and Labourist forms of socialist politics. That Marxism, let alone the Left, rarely did and does not now reduce to either Leninism or Labourism is ignored, along with the writings of Marx and Engels themselves, not to mention the libertarian critics of Lenin.

There are many weaknesses in the Marxism that has inspired most of the Left for over a hundred years—its economism, homogenizing of class interests, and inability adequately to theorize the position of

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<sup>5</sup> Pippa Norris, *Politics and Sexual Equality: The Comparative Position of Women in Western Democracies*, Brighton 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Here, like Kate Soper in her excellent collection of essays *Troubled Pleasures* (see footnote 12), I refer to 'socialist' goals as those which 'conflict with the logic of the untrammelled market' involving forms of planning and redistribution of wealth at odds with the logic of capital accumulation.

<sup>7</sup> Eisenstein, p. 50

women and other non-class oppressions. But that tradition was never *synonymous* with the elitism and authoritarianism that has characterized Leninist notions of the vanguard party substituting itself for mass support, any more than it was synonymous with the paternalism that has characterized Fabian notions of the democratic state reforming from above and hostile to extra-parliamentary culture, movements and struggles.

Today we face a cultural climate where much of the Left, like those associated with *Charter 88*, has moved so far to the right that nineteenth-century liberalism has become its centre. Few people across the political spectrum could object to a project that seeks 'a constitution which protects *individual* rights and the institutions of a *modern and pluralistic* democracy'. The USA has precisely such a Constitution, as does Colombia. At a time when Thatcher was so aggressively attacking existing democratic rights, *Charter 88* provided a rallying point for a broad oppositional democratic alliance. It also highlighted the many anachronistic structures of the existing British state—from the House of Lords to the nature of the judiciary. However, it left open for debate the crucial issue of whether social needs for health, housing, education and adequate welfare, which must be met *before* people can put to any good use their rights as citizens, should be guaranteed as well. In the face of the real economic and cultural factors which limit the participation of many in active citizenship (not least the many women whose primary relationship to the state is one of dependence rather than autonomy), the Charter once again exposes the very real limits of liberalism, however progressive, articulated over a hundred years ago in the contradictions of John Stuart Mill.<sup>18</sup>

Desperate to adapt in this new cultural climate, there was little discernible trace of socialist strategies in the most recent Labour Party Policy Review. Much of the Trotskyist Left, on the other hand, which has now taken up some of the rhetoric of the new social movements around women, Blacks, gays and lesbians, has done so only, or primarily, as part of a politics of confrontation with what remains of the reformist structures of social democracy in local government and the trade unions.

But, before we say goodbye to socialism, should we not take the time to learn from the mistakes of the past, and reject, as did the social movements of the seventies, the centralized, authoritarian, top-down practices of *both* social democracy and Leninism? Should we not also pause a moment to recognize the weaknesses of the new social movements themselves? Without access to the resources of strengthened social-democratic reformist structures, as decentralized and accountable as possible, and without strong trade unions, the social movements (particularly as conceived by the theorists of difference) can offer little more than the enjoyment of an endless game of self-exploration played out on the great board of Identity.

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<sup>18</sup> The first of still very few left critiques of *Charter 88*, pointing out the complicated and confusing politics behind it, and the crucial omissions for socialists within it, is Peter Osborne's brief but lucid 'Extensions of Liberty: What *Charter 88* Leaves Out', *Interlink*, February/March 1989, pp. 22–3

## Prefatory Note

*We draw readers' attention to this letter from Andrzej Walicki, and to the postscript at the end of the article.*

25 September 1990

Dear Editor,

I appreciate your proposal to publish my paper on Poland (given at the Center For Social Theory and Comparative History at UCLA, California on 21 May 1990). Your readers, however, should know that I have never been close to the New Left. I consider myself a right-wing liberal democrat and would not like to create confusion about my political sympathies.

I am not a man of the Left but, as a liberal, I take it for granted that the Left, including the post-communist Left, should have its legitimate place in Polish politics. I am critical of the noisy right-wing populism in Poland because its use of popular anti-communist feelings creates an atmosphere of intolerance, diverting attention from real problems and posing a threat to the rule of law. I oppose its demand for 'strict limitations on the former nomenklatura's participation in the economy and state institutions' (see M. Zalewski, 'Let Solidarity Break in Two', *Newsweek*, 16 July 1990, p. 6) because this amounts to a call for *Berufsverbot*, which is incompatible with law-abiding democracy. I reject the idea of 'revenge' for both pragmatic and moral reasons: because the Polish ex-Communists, who had surrendered their monopoly of power in a peaceful, negotiated manner, are now a weak, ideologically disarmed, intimidated minority; and the real test of a democracy is its attitude to the defeated. In a word, I fully agree with Adam Michnik—whose newspaper has recently been stripped of its right to represent Solidarity—that 'if a logic of retaliation gains the upper hand, we will again face the hell of a dictatorship.' (See Flora Lewis, 'Post-Communist Blues', *New York Times*, 22 September 1990, p. 15.)

My views on the pitfalls of anti-communist crusades are known in Poland. I have presented them in both right-wing (*democratic right-wing*) and left-wing periodicals. Hence I see no obstacles to appearing, as an invited guest, in the pages of *New Left Review*.

Sincerely,

Andrzej Walicki

University of Notre Dame, Indiana.



## From Stalinism to Post-Communist Pluralism: The Case of Poland

The classical theories of totalitarianism, as elaborated in the 1950s, described totalitarian systems as imposing total ideological conformity, effectively controlling minds and consciences, eliminating all forms of opposition, and thus being virtually immune to internal change. It is no wonder that the gradual dismantling of Stalinism, which began officially in 1956 (and in fact somewhat earlier), seriously undermined this model. 'Within the confines of the so-called totalitarian model,' wrote Chalmers Johnson, 'it is hard to conceptualize development and its consequences... It is even harder to conceptualize the resulting unintended changes in the social structures and the consequences of those changes.'<sup>1</sup> As a result, the majority of scholars came to the conclusion that 'totalitarianism as a concept had lost its explanatory power; that it is oversimplified; that it is too narrow in focus; that it unduly magnified Soviet peculiarities, such as Marxist ideology.'<sup>2</sup> Some went even further, treating the theory of totalitarianism as a product of the Cold War and rejecting it altogether. I do not share this conclusion. My own experience

does not allow me to doubt that Stalinism was indeed a close approximation to the 'totalitarian model'. Its dismantling does not warrant the conclusion that 'totalitarianism is not a regime' and that it should not be given 'a permanent place in the typologies of political science'.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary. For all those interested in human freedom (and unfreedom) it is indeed necessary to pay special attention to the regime that tried to coerce people not only from without, but also from within, by controlling their thoughts and feelings; that pursued this Orwellian goal by means of a deliberately organized, constantly exercised, all-pervasive and brutally direct politico-moral pressure, supported by physical and moral intimidation.

It is obvious that Communist totalitarianism had to be aggressively ideological. It derived its legitimacy from a commitment to ideologically inspired action, aiming at a total transformation of society; it aimed even to transform the very nature of man. Hence it could not survive the process of de-ideologization. Without a strong feeling of self-confidence, stemming from faith in their historical mission, Communists cannot rule in a totalitarian way. The external structures of their apparatus of power can remain seemingly unchanged but, nevertheless, the erosion of ideology inevitably transforms them into an empty and increasingly fragile shell. And this entails a long and tortuous process of de-totalitarianization.

#### De-totalitarianization

The notion of de-totalitarianization enables us to accept the totalitarian model as an adequate explanation of the militantly ideological phase in the development of 'actually existing socialism' while, at the same time, making it clear that the further development of this system consisted in the gradual abandonment of its totalitarian features. This position has been taken by Zbigniew Brzezinski, a leading theorist of Communist totalitarianism. On the eve of the events of 1989 he elaborated an ambitious sketch of a theory of 'phases in the retreat from Communism'. According to him, 'Communist totalitarianism' is being replaced by 'Communist authoritarianism', to be followed by 'post-Communist authoritarianism', and finally 'post-Communist pluralism'. In 1988 the first phase, 'totalitarianism', was exemplified by Albania, North Korea and Vietnam; the Soviet Union represented 'Communist authoritarianism'. Hungary and Poland were seen as passing from Communist authoritarianism to the non-Communist one, while 'post-Communist pluralism' remained a theoretical possibility.<sup>4</sup> It is arguable that this classification was too cautious, and it is evident that the sudden acceleration of political change made it obsolete in 1990. As a general scheme, however, Brzezinski's theory of

<sup>1</sup> Chalmers Johnson, 'Comparing Communist Nations', in C. Johnson, ed., *Change in Communist Systems*, Stanford 1970, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Terry McNeill, 'The Western Scholarly Debate', in A. Shtrumas and M.A. Kaplan, eds., *The Soviet Union and the Challenge of the Future* Volume 1, New York 1988, p. 318.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Walzer, 'On Failed Totalitarianism', in Irving Howe, ed., *1984 Reviewed*, New York 1983, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> See Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1989, pp. 252-8.

'the retreat from totalitarianism' has been impressively vindicated by events.

At all events, one can safely say that Western political scientists abandoned the notion of an 'unchangeable essence of totalitarianism' in the 1970s. Only a lunatic fringe of anti-Communist fanatics (like, for instance, Alain Besançon) stubbornly supported the view that totalitarianism did not change, and that the difference between the Soviet Union under Brezhnev and the Soviet Union under Stalin, or, say, Poland under Gierek and Poland under Bierut, were wholly negligible. One of the main causes of this stubbornness was, undoubtedly, the emergence and the subsequent crushing of the Solidarity movement in Poland. Its intellectual leaders defined it as an anti-totalitarian movement, thus stressing the totalitarian nature of the existing party-state. Its crushing by the military forces was interpreted as a vigorous reassertion of totalitarianism. Poland under martial law was described as a particularly oppressive totalitarian regime—peculiarly oppressive because based upon 'naked force' and forcibly imposed on an openly hostile population. This interpretation accords with what I call the 'democratic fallacy': the simplistic view that totalitarianism boils down to the absence of political democracy. From the vulgar-democratic point of view a non-democratic regime is better (more consistent with the popular will) when its social base is large and when it can rule with the tacit consent of the majority; the worst type of regime appears to be that whose rule is based upon 'naked force'. This explains why the description of Poland under martial law as a paradigmatic case of totalitarianism found a wide and easy acceptance in the West.

In fact, however, this was a great, paradoxical misunderstanding. Totalitarian rule, as Czesław Miłosz tried to explain, cannot be reduced to the rule of force.<sup>5</sup> 'Naked force', as applied in ordinary police-states, aims only at the preservation of 'law and order'—that is, outward conformity—and has neither capacity nor ambition to create a 'new man' enthusiastically supporting (or, at least, forcing himself to support) all the aims and ideals of the rulers. Lack of consent is not typical of totalitarianism, because a truly totalitarian regime can enforce much more than merely passive consent; the relationship of 'open hostility' means that the ruled have liberated themselves from both fear and indoctrination, which marks the end of totalitarianism. And the emergence of a powerful social movement, openly oppositional in character and fighting for a share of political power, means that the given country has already entered the phase of 'Communist authoritarianism' and seeks to liberate itself from authoritarian (but no longer totalitarian) rule. At the totalitarian stage, a struggle for *collective* self-determination, for the 'subjectivity of society', would have been quite impossible.

A drastic curtailment of non-political civil liberties is not necessarily a step towards re-establishing totalitarianism. 'The extinguishing of civil liberties in order to maintain and strengthen the regime,' wrote

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<sup>5</sup> See Czesław Miłosz, *Captive Mind*, Harmondsworth 1985, p. 6.

Leszek Kolakowski, 'does not amount to totalitarianism unless accompanied by the principle that every activity—economic, cultural, etc.—must be completely subordinated to the aims of the state; that not only are the acts against the regime forbidden and ruthlessly punished, but no political actions are "neutral" and the individual citizen has no right to do anything that is not part of the state's purpose; that he is the state's property and is treated by it as such.'<sup>6</sup>

General Jaruzelski did not try to justify martial law in terms of Marxist ideology. His speech explaining it was remarkably free from Orwellian language. His government stressed many times that it did not need to be loved; it wanted only to be recognized as a 'lesser evil', a geopolitical necessity, thus deriving its legitimacy from a certain understanding of the national interest at the given moment, and not from any universalist ideology. Utopian vision of the 'radiant future' completely disappeared, giving way to a rather gloomy realism; the authorities carefully avoided excessive optimism in assessing the economic situation because they now knew how dangerous it might be to allow the rise of popular expectations and then prove unable to fulfil them. The existing system was no longer praised as the best possible; on the contrary, the ruling group tried to exculpate itself by putting all the blame on the anonymous systemic mechanisms. The totalitarian aim of 'political and moral unanimity' was officially abandoned, and replaced by a policy of so-called 'socialist pluralism', which required only a necessary *minimum* of national consensus. Political mobilization of the masses became conceivable only as a popular crusade *against* the regime; hence, paradoxically, the Party began to encourage apoliticism.

Comparing this situation with the world described in Miłosz's *Captive Mind* showed a remarkable reversal of roles. Under Stalinism it was the authorities who used and abused politico-moral pressure, while now it was the opposition who organized such pressure in the name of national unity, enforcing non-collaboration with the authorities and silencing dissidents within its ranks. 'Dual consciousness' was now the lot of many Party members still loyal to the Party but exposed, nonetheless, to the 'moral terror' of its enemies. Gone and forgotten were the times when the Party was able to impose Communist ideals on intellectuals and artists; now intellectuals and artists engaged in actively delegitimizing the system through both the political content of their works and ostentatious refusal to cooperate with official institutions.<sup>7</sup> The ideological legitimization of the system ceased to be treated seriously even by its otherwise staunch supporters; isolated attempts to revive it appeared ridiculous, and public declarations in favour of Communism required more civic courage than did public attacks on it.

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<sup>6</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* Volume 2, Oxford 1981, p. 514.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed and colourful presentation of these activities, see 'Independent Culture in Poland', *Uncaptive Minds*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1989, pp. 25–32. (The title of this journal is an allusion to Miłosz's *Captive Mind*.) See also Andrzej Walicki, 'The Paradoxes of Jaruzelski's Poland', *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, vol. xxvi, no. 2, 1985, pp. 167–92.

To sum up. In contrast to totalitarian regimes, the Polish regime of the 1980s (1) did not derive its legitimacy from an all-embracing ideology; (2) did not commit itself to 'a single positively formulated goal', emphasizing instead legal rules and even espousing the idea of a 'socialist constitutionalism'; (3) did not attempt to politicize all spheres of life, especially intellectual and cultural; and, finally, (4) did not try to encourage and organize a controlled political activation of the masses, clinging instead to the traditional policy of keeping the masses away from politics.<sup>8</sup> In other words, it became similar to traditional authoritarian regimes. This was not a sudden volte-face, but the final outcome of a process that had begun already in 1956. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that what had been under Gierek (December 1970–November 1980) a mostly unintended result of the increasing de-ideologization, and also corruption, of the Party, became under martial law a consciously adopted policy. In fact, the final abandonment of totalitarianism in favour of a self-limiting and consensus-seeking authoritarianism was the gist of Jaruzelski's political programme. It was not enough as a programme of reform, adequate to Solidarity's challenge, but it was nonetheless a programmatic retreat.

### Mythologizing the Enemy

In this manner, the theory of totalitarianism lost its relevance in Poland. But, paradoxically, the Polish opposition refused to acknowledge this fact. On the contrary: the retreat from totalitarianism brought into being a powerful anti-Communist crusade—presenting itself as a struggle against 'totalitarianism'. Books which expressed the spirit of this ideological offensive claimed there was no essential difference between Stalinist totalitarianism and Jaruzelski's regime. Books about the Stalinist past, about crimes committed by Communists everywhere in the world, came to be regarded as disclosing the essential truth about 'them'—Poland's Communist rulers.

Very typical, from this point of view, is the fate of an important collection of interviews with the veterans of Polish Stalinism: Teresa Toranska's *Them*.<sup>9</sup> This book was originally commissioned by a state-owned publishing house in Poland, and one of its chapters was published in 1981 in the weekly *Polityka*, a semi-official organ of the liberalizing wing of the Party. At that stage the pronoun 'them' referred to the *former* rulers of Poland, the 'paleological Communists', whose mentality had become almost incomprehensible to the younger generations of Party members. The editors of *Polityka* took it for granted that their readers would be struck, above all, by the *contrast* between the old, dogmatic Communists, like Berman and Ochab, and the new, pragmatic leadership of the Party; it was quite rational to suppose that an increased awareness of this contrast would benefit the contemporary rulers, by helping them to present themselves as a much lesser

<sup>8</sup> See C.J. Friedrich and Z.K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Cambridge, Mass. 1956, pp. 9–10.

<sup>9</sup> Teresa Toranska, *'Them'. Stalin's Polish Puppets*, trans. A. Kolakowska, New York 1987.

evil. However, the proclamation of martial law changed everything in this respect. Toranska's book (published underground and reprinted in London) came to be seen as a collective portrait of Polish Communists in general, and not only Communist old-timers. People who did not share this view, who did not allow themselves to forget the sharp contrast between Polish Communism under Bierut and Polish Communism of the 1970s and 1980s, were socially ostracized as playing into the hands of Jaruzelski's regime. They even risked being accused of a hidden anti-Semitism, because to emphasize the contrast between, say, General Czesław Kiszczak and Jakub Berman seemed to support the view that a 'purely Polish' Communist leadership was better than the 'Jewish' one. Incredible, but true.

Thus, under martial law Polish intellectuals refused to notice any difference between Jaruzelski's regime and classical Stalinist totalitarianism, or even between Polish Communists of the 1980s and Russian Communists of the Stalinist period. A good illustration of this attitude was the conduct of a colleague of mine, a well-known historian of philosophy and a former soldier of the Home Army, with first-hand knowledge of the Soviet Gulag. At the beginning of 1984 the deputy premier, Mieczysław Rakowski, invited her, together with other intellectuals, to discuss the current problems facing Polish culture. She reacted to this invitation by sending Rakowski a letter (properly publicized, to be sure) in which she told him that in the eyes of honest Poles all Party leaders were responsible for the Katyn massacre, and that only a wholesale renunciation of the Communist tradition could free them from this terrible responsibility.

Similar views were being hammered into the heads of Polish intellectuals by innumerable underground publications, eagerly read, discussed, memorized and distributed as widely as possible.<sup>20</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that in the 1980s (beginning, perhaps, in the late 1970s) a major part of the Polish intelligentsia underwent an extremely intensive process of anti-Communist self-indoctrination. Buying, reading and distributing all manner of anti-Communist, or potentially anti-Communist, literature—from classical analyses of Communist totalitarianism and first-rate historical monographs to disparate memoirs, novels and journalistic writings, including even vulgarly propagandist tracts—was seen as a primary duty of a conscious Polish patriot. As a result, the perception of the surrounding sociopolitical reality became profoundly ideologized and thereby heavily distorted. A weak and frightened regime, begging for a minimum of popular support and trying to woo intellectuals by an almost total ideological surrender, was perceived as a powerful, omnipotent and all-pervasive totalitarian system. Its timid and selective repressive actions were compared to the Stalinist terror, or to the brutal performance of the Gestapo. Its functionaries were presented as embodying an unshakable belief in their historical mission—a position against which the opposition set its belief in absolute moral values. In fact this was a grotesque mythologization of the 'actually existing

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<sup>20</sup> In 1983 the number of titles of underground publications reached the impressive figure of seven hundred. See *Kultura*, no. 5, 1983, pp. 102–11.

socialism' of the 1980s. But mythological images held sway over people's minds, overshadowing the inconsistencies of reality.

A classical expression of this mythologizing viewpoint is Adam Michnik's book *Reflections on the History of Honor in Poland* (1985). It pays homage to those who have understood the deep sense of a hopeless struggle, a struggle for a 'doomed cause'; it proclaims that 'moral purity' is incomparably superior to victory, and contemptuously rejects concern for the efficacy of action as either meaningless or leading to betrayal. In the name of honour, Michnik refuses even to understand the motives of the perpetrators of moral evil. He warns that to engage in a dialogue with the enemy might lead to spiritual surrender. On the last page he proudly condemns Realism, Reasonableness and Historical Necessity, setting against them the only reliable truth—that of conscience.<sup>12</sup> It is strange to read these statements in the spring of 1990. The cause defined as 'doomed' and 'hopeless' proved to be victorious. The great change took place by means of a peaceful dialogue with the 'perpetrators of moral evil'. Adam Michnik was the first to recommend General Jaruzelski for the office of President of the new, post-Communist Poland. General Kiszczak, the Minister of the Interior, directly responsible for martial law, now enjoys friendly relations with Walesa and Michnik; his wife has written a letter to the emigré monthly *Kultura* claiming recognition for the importance of her husband's role in the destruction of the Communist system in Poland.<sup>13</sup> The functionaries of the Ministry of the Interior joyously reject their previous tasks, transforming themselves into 'normal policemen' of the American type.<sup>14</sup> The state holiday symbolizing the birth of the 'People's Poland' has been abolished, the crown on the head of the Polish eagle, as well as the prewar name of the Polish state, restored. The Communist Party no longer exists; those of its former members who were elected (as Communists) to Parliament, eagerly support Mazowiecki's government; the successor party, renamed Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland, has only sixty thousand members and, despite numerous declarations of loyalty, faces increasing difficulties in all areas. Adam Michnik, formerly a paradigmatic incarnation of moralistic heroism, stands accused, by various extremists,<sup>14</sup> of supporting a policy of moral compromises and of reconciliation with the ex-Communist reformers. His philosophy

<sup>12</sup> See Adam Michnik, *Z dziejów honoru w Polsce*, Paris 1985, pp. 121, 132–4, 170, 280. It should be noted that this book was written in prison.

<sup>13</sup> See her 'Letter to the Editor', *Kultura*, no. 4, 1990, pp. 152–6.

<sup>14</sup> See E. Berberiusz, 'Podzwonne. Wicłci z Rakowieckiej', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 15–16, 15–22 April 1990, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> From such organizations as Solidarity's 'Workers' Group' (Andrzej Gwiazda et al.), 'Militant Solidarity' (which prefers to operate underground), Marian Jurczyk's 'Solidarity 1980' (stressing the difference between the original Solidarity and the Solidarity of 1989), the nationalist Confederation For Independent Poland (KPN), and many other, lesser known, political groupings. Understandably, the emigré press likes to repeat their views, or to formulate its own utterly critical comments. Thus, for instance, the well-known emigré writer, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, accused Michnik of 'ennobling the crime of "Martial Law"', and of (allegedly) celebrating its anniversary on the pages of his *Gazeta Wyborcza*. See G. Herling-Grudziński, 'Dziennik pisany noca', *Kultura*, no. 4, 1990, pp. 13–17.

of intransigence is now being levelled against himself and against Mazowiecki's government.

How was it possible? Totalitarianism was supposed not to yield to any internal pressure. Therefore, what miracle could cause its sudden collapse in Poland? The easiest answer to this question attributes everything to Soviet permission: what would have been impossible under Brezhnev has become possible, and therefore inevitable, under Gorbachev. The value of this explanation should not be underestimated: it seems quite clear that without the 'Gorbachev factor' the example of Poland would not have been followed by other countries of east-central Europe. But it is equally clear that the collapse of the (so-called) Communist system in Poland was preceded by a long, complicated process of internal development: a process of de-totalitarianization which explains also the emergence of the 'Gorbachev phenomenon'. In other words, the system that has collapsed in Poland was no longer totalitarianism; its collapse was gradual, not sudden. The simultaneous collapse in other countries of 'actually existing socialism'—countries in which an overt political opposition had been incomparably less significant than in Poland—provides an important argument for the thesis that conscious political pressure cannot be regarded as the only cause of this development. This view seems to be common-sensical; nevertheless, it would not be easy to defend in Poland. Political leaders of contemporary Poland, including the moderates, like the Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, firmly believe that before the elections of 4 June 1989, Poland was a totalitarian country, that their adversaries from the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) were convinced totalitarian Communists, and consequently that they themselves—the Solidarity-led opposition—could legitimately claim the merit of defeating the totalitarian dragon.

The self-serving aspect of this belief is obvious. It is pleasing to see oneself as a miracle-worker, the sole conqueror of the Devil. Arguably, it is natural to indulge half-consciously in self-glorification. Nobody denies that the political leaders of today's Poland have many reasons to be proud of their achievements. But it does not follow that their views of themselves, or of their former and present adversaries, should be uncritically accepted, or passed over in silence. On the contrary: we should take seriously their commitment 'to live in truth' (that is, not to resort to fictions), to combat ideological lies, and to overcome the legacy of totalitarian oppression. This commitment is no longer compatible with an anti-totalitarian obsession. A truly radical overcoming of the totalitarian legacy requires methods other than an ideological mobilization against a mythologized, demonized enemy.

### The Simplifications of 'New Evolutionism'

To understand the current state of mind of the majority of politically active Poles, it is necessary to recall a certain theory, formulated in the seventies and uncritically accepted by the leaders of the democratic opposition in Poland. I mean the theory of the so-called 'new evolutionism', born of the disillusionment with Marxist revisionism. The



intention of its main authors, Leszek Kolakowski and Adam Michnik,<sup>5</sup> was to warn potential oppositionists against the temptations of intrasystemic activity. They claimed therefore that the great 'thaw' of 1956 did not change the totalitarian nature of 'actually existing socialism' in Poland; that the differences among the ruling political elite were negligible and no group within it was worthy of support; and that different views in this matter should be treated as an expression of opportunistic accommodationism, or as relics of revisionist illusions. The existing totalitarian system did not contain any mechanisms whose development would ensure a meaningful change; hence its evolution was possible only as a result of *external* pressure. The task of the opposition was to organize social forces and to mobilize them to exercise a powerful pressure from without on the totalitarian rulers, thus forcing them to make involuntary concessions which would amount finally to a general retreat.

At first glance, the imposing victory of Solidarity can be regarded as a convincing corroboration of this theory. In fact, however, the very emergence of an 'extrasystemic' opposition would not have been possible without a long process of internal de-totalitarianization. To ignore the importance of all intrasystemic changes and, instead, attribute everything to a consciously organized and ostentatiously 'external' politico-moral pressure, is in fact an extremely voluntaristic and wholly untenable theoretical standpoint—a curious combination of programmatic anti-Leninism with a truly Leninist emphasis on 'subjective factors', such as consciousness, heroic will and ideological motivation. Thus, the theory of the 'new evolutionism' cannot account for the entire process of de-totalitarianization. On the contrary: it seriously warps our understanding of the process and does not provide the opposition with a reliable guideline to action. This is probably one of the main reasons why its followers were caught by surprise by both their defeat in 1981 and their victory in 1989. Of course, a comprehensive theory of de-totalitarianization, as well as 'decommunization' of 'actually existing socialism', cannot be outlined in a short essay. It is possible, however, to point out the main factors of this tortuous process.

The main cause of this process was the objective impossibility of realizing the Communist utopia. Totalitarianism was an attempt to realize this utopia through a process of forcibly moulding human nature by means of ideological and physical coercion: mobilization of enthusiasm and mobilization of fear. It turned out, however, that neither its apparatus of indoctrination, nor its apparatus of repression, could succeed in establishing the total control over 'blind', spontaneous forces that constitutes the Communist ideal of freedom.<sup>6</sup> All attempts to achieve this utopian ideal, by eliminating the 'anarchic'

<sup>5</sup> See Leszek Kolakowski, 'Tęży o nadziei i beznadziejności', *Kultura*, no. 6, 1977; and Adam Michnik, 'Nowy ewolucjonizm' (1978), in his *Szansa polskiej demokracji*, London 1984, pp. 77–87. These original formulations of 'new evolutionism' (especially Kolakowski's) contained some caveats which made them more sophisticated than my account of it given below might suggest. My presentation deals only with the essentials of this theory.

<sup>6</sup> See Andrzej Walicki, 'Karl Marx as Philosopher of Freedom', *Critical Review*, vol. 2, no. 4, Fall 1988, pp. 10–58.

forces of the market and enforcing ideological unanimity, brought about unintended results, thwarting the intentions of the 'utopians in power'. Instead of a 'rational mastery over man's species forces', there appeared a world in which nothing could be properly controlled, a world of total alienation, pregnant with a destructive chaos. In this way the Communists ceased to be 'the ones who are directing', becoming instead 'the ones who are being directed'.<sup>17</sup> This diagnosis, formulated already by Lenin, defines the most general and entirely objective cause of the 'Grand Failure'.

On the level of the 'economic base' it was a failure of planned economy; on the level of the 'superstructure' it was a corresponding failure in forging a 'single collective will', followed by the increasing de-ideologization of the Communists themselves. The method of central planning, which was to realize the ideal of freedom as conscious, rational control over 'blind forces', destroyed the self-regulating order of the market, replacing it with a constantly growing and changing multiplicity of bureaucratic-administrative rules, often completely impractical, contradicting each other and leaving ample room for self-interested bargaining behind the scenes, fulfilling plans on paper only, and thus creating a system of complete economic irrationality and irresponsibility. The bureaucratic and managerial cadres transformed themselves into rival groups of special interests, thereby undermining both Communist ideology and the totalitarian principle of a 'single will'. Permanent ideological mobilization of the masses, or even of their so-called 'vanguard', proved to be practically impossible, and the 'routinized' forms of indoctrination produced only an Orwellian 'dual consciousness', having nothing in common with the legitimizing Promethean ideal of the 'Communist man'. The notorious inefficiency and multiple irrationalities of the command economy brought into being the underground 'second economy' which reduced planning to a fiction and begot monstrous corruption. Even its alleged 'centralism' came to be merely a mendacious appearance, because the real decision-making was more and more in the hands of local cliques and mafias organized in accordance with traditional principles of clientelism.

All these processes, released by the termination of the Stalinist terror, throw more light on the initial stages of de-totalitarianization than any noble oppositional activity. They were accompanied by a rapid erosion of the legitimizing ideology—an erosion which was also an 'intra-systemic' development, and not a reaction to external pressure. Kola-kowski was right when he wrote (in his 'revisionist' phase) that Khrushchev's 'secret speech' about Stalin, at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, dealt a mortal blow to 'Communist mythology'.<sup>18</sup> He was right in predicting that the consequences of it would be far-reaching and irreversible. However, the pace of the changes was not as quick as the revisionists would have wished. The undeniable increase in individual freedom could not

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<sup>17</sup> See *The Lenin Anthology*, edited by R. C. Tucker, New York 1973, p. 427.

<sup>18</sup> See Leszek Kołakowski, 'Śmierć bogów', *Pisma rozpraszane z lat 1955–1968*, vol. 2, London 1989, pp. 102–10.

satisfy those who were interested above all in freedom in the public sphere, freedom of political action. After all, the control of the public sphere, including the economy, remained in the hands of the nomenklatura, the privileged Party cadres. Hence the appearance of a widespread tendency to deny the anti-totalitarian character of the changes. Poland, it was argued, remained totalitarian because the 'thaw' of 1956 did not remove the privileges of the nomenklatura and the monopolistic rule of the Party.

In fact, totalitarianism is, of course, much more than monopolistic rule in politics. Conceiving it as merely the opposite of political democracy amounts to ignoring its 'teleocratic' and 'ideocratic' aspirations, its programmatic rejection of the autonomy of the 'private sphere'. I have called it above 'the democratic fallacy', boiling down to a factual denial of the important theoretical distinction between 'totalitarianism' and mere 'authoritarianism'. To perceive the most important feature of totalitarianism in 'the birth of a new ruling class—the political bureaucracy, the nomenklatura',<sup>19</sup> is a complete misunderstanding. It is true that under Stalin bureaucratic and professional Party cadres came to be vastly privileged; nonetheless, they were not allowed 'to form a compact and articulate body with a socio-political identity of its own'.<sup>20</sup> The fully fledged nomenklatura that is something similar to a 'new class' enjoying a certain corporate independence and thinking in terms of its corporate interests (that is, in terms of self-reproduction, and not in terms of a ceaseless revolutionary effort to realize the Communist idea) could flourish only in the post-totalitarian stage of Communism. In post-Stalinist Poland members of the nomenklatura were, as a rule, thoroughly de-ideologized, belonging to different 'special-interest groups', closely connected with the 'second economy' and comprising also non-Party members. The inevitable pluralism of these groups contradicted the totalitarian ideal of a fully controlled, centrally planned economy, and thereby paved the way for de-totalitarianization.<sup>21</sup>

### Loosening the Controls

It is evident therefore that monopolistic rule in politics could not save ideological and economic controls. Loosening of these controls was, objectively, the first and decisive step towards de-totalitarianization. Its further progress was conditioned by both objective processes of systemic disintegration and conscious activities of the different elites, operating on all levels of society. In this way almost the entire population of Poland came to be involved, directly or indirectly, in all manner of deviant activities, loosening systemic controls without resorting to an overt political struggle. Very often it was a purely spontaneous behaviour, dictated by narrowly conceived individual or group

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<sup>19</sup> M. Voslensky, 'The Soviet System: Historical and Theoretical Evaluation', in A. Shtrumas and M.A. Kaplan, eds., *The Soviet Union* Volume 1, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> See Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929–1940* London 1963, pp. 306–7.

<sup>21</sup> Jerry F. Hough has the merit of paying due attention to this aspect of the Soviet system (although his conclusions have been premature and therefore untenable).

interest; sometimes, however, it could be a fully conscious, well-calculated defence of anti-totalitarian and anti-Communist values. Thus, for instance, in the sphere of *intellectual* life, Stalinist Poland was undoubtedly an arena of conscious and very effective struggle against the system.

It is important to note that conscious ideological de-totalitarianization was also very visible within the ruling Party. It has been rightly observed that even the hardline Party leaders rejected Communist totalitarianism as incompatible with traditional nationalist values.<sup>22</sup> The liberal wing of the Party, as well as the critically thinking members of the 'technocratic' part of the nomenklatura (motivated, to be sure, by an enlightened understanding of their own interests), had great merit in denouncing the economic absurdities of the system and in proclaiming the need for decentralizing, market-oriented reforms. The positive role of the weekly *Polityka* can hardly be exaggerated. After martial law, advocates of a radical marketization, admirers of the economic policies of Margaret Thatcher, became influential both outside and inside the Party. The regime's failure to introduce a consistent marketizing reform cannot be attributed to the resistance of the nomenklatura, or (even less) to doctrinal inhibitions. It was rather a result of its fear of the workers. The industrial nomenklatura were quite willing to transform themselves into managers of semi-private companies and to enrich themselves by resorting to market methods. It was the workers who did not accept the austerity programme bound up with the reform, especially if the 'new capitalists' were to be recruited from their former Communist bosses.

Poland's non-Communist leaders, formerly members of the Solidarity-led opposition, stubbornly repeat that before their coming to power Poland was a 'totalitarian' country; indeed many of them see Poland as semi-totalitarian even now, because of Jaruzelski's presidency, or because members of the former nomenklatura have managed to retain their jobs. In fact, however, the Poland of 1989, or even the Poland under martial law, cannot be called 'totalitarian' in any meaningful sense of the term. In many respects its regime was not only 'post-totalitarian' but post-Communist as well: after all, Communism means commitment to the ideal of a marketless and moneyless economy, a programmatic abolition of commodity production, and not commitment to 'marketization' and 'privatization'. It was a regime that had rejected, silently but consciously, its Communist identity, replacing its doctrinal (Communist) legitimation with national legitimation, and justifying its existence on pragmatic grounds, such as a geopolitical conception of Polish national interest, the 'lesser evil', or simply the interests of its supporters. It had, indeed, very little in common with either Communism (as a socioeconomic ideal) or Leninism (as the model for a Communist party-state).

It is difficult to believe that the 'anti-totalitarian' opposition was wholly unaware of this. It is equally difficult to understand how it was

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<sup>22</sup> See Miroslaw Dzielski, *Duch niedobrego czasu*, published underground, Cracow 1986, p. 176

possible to claim that the process of de-totalitarianization in east-central Europe *started* only in the mid 1970s, with the emergence of the Polish democratic opposition.<sup>23</sup> It is incomprehensible (at least for the present author) to see how it was possible to defend on intellectual grounds a theory of de-totalitarianization that so completely disregarded the objective mechanisms at work in the decomposition of the system, as well as the activities of different 'intrasystemic' forces, including the consciously anti-totalitarian but not overtly political, intrasystemic opposition. Is it not obvious that a truly totalitarian regime would not have yielded to a non-violent but openly hostile politico-moral pressure? Is it not self-evident that under totalitarianism the ruling political elite cannot be put on the defensive by democratic forces, or that non-violent means cannot 'force' it to make concessions which pave the way for its total surrender? The only way to explain the emergence and widespread influence of the concept of the 'new evolutionism' is to see it as a tool of political struggle. Incomprehensible on intellectual grounds, the concept is readily comprehensible as a justification of a certain political conduct. In summary, it has been employed to serve the following political purposes.

Its first purpose or function was, of course, ideological mobilization for an active and overt, non-violent but intransigent, political struggle. Such mobilization would have been impossible if all forms of intrasystemic activity, including consciously oppositional ones, had not been discredited, as based upon illusions and leading ultimately to accommodation with the existing system and increasing thereby its capacity to survive. Secondly, the concept provided a convenient rationale for the moral condemnation of compromises (since totalitarianism is absolute evil), and enabled the opposition to present itself as a kind of religious crusade (since totalitarianism is equivalent to the rule of the devil).<sup>24</sup> This function was especially important in the period following martial law, when the government was trying to placate its enemies, to engage them in a dialogue, and to obtain in return a measure of national and democratic legitimacy. The adoption of a heroically 'anti-totalitarian' posture helped the opposition to immunize itself against these temptations, to reject 'normal' political methods (such as negotiations, bargaining, mutual compromises) in favour of a fundamentalist, 'antipolitical' attitude, expressing itself in sweeping protests and symbolic gestures.<sup>25</sup> It is undeniable that this fundamentalist tactic proved to be very efficacious in weakening the regime, isolating it, and destroying all remnants of its legitimacy.

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<sup>23</sup> In a recent article, Adam Michnik repeated this thesis verbatim. He wrote: 'The turning point came in the mid 1970s. The Polish democratic opposition, then being established, broke with the notion of 'true' socialism... Nobody was looking for socialism anymore and nobody was reflecting on its definition. The opposition began using concrete language, with few references to doctrine. That is how the great process of destruction *started*, the process affecting totalitarian ideology in central and eastern Europe... The idea of human rights was born—an anti-totalitarian formula for liberating people subjected to Soviet ideology.' Adam Michnik, 'Does Socialism Have Any Future in Europe?', *Stadium Papers*, vol. XIII, no. 4, October 1989, p. 183, stress added.

<sup>24</sup> See Dzielski, *Duch*, pp. 167–9.

<sup>25</sup> See T.G. Ash, *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe*, New York 1989, pp. 190–3, 203, 208–10.

Hence it served its political purpose very well. But it does not follow that it was based on a correct theoretical diagnosis. On the contrary: its political successes were the best proof that the embattled regime was no longer totalitarian, that it was deprived of self-confidence and unable to embark on an ideological offensive of its own. Finally, it served the purpose of self-aggrandizement, which was also an important instrument of political struggle. Presenting the system as an essentially unchanged 'totalitarianism'—as an immensely powerful system of total domination—was, to be sure, a grandiose mystification, but it is well known that mystifications can be used as an effective weapon in political combat. The enormous prestige of the 'anti-totalitarian' opposition depended on the demonization of its enemy; the oppositionists knew this and therefore wanted the regime to be perceived as more formidable, more 'totalitarian' and 'Communist' than it really was. Michnik's concession to common sense, the definition of Jaruzelski's regime as 'totalitarianism with the teeth knocked out',<sup>26</sup> was acceptable because it implied that the democratic opposition deserved the credit for breaking the teeth of the totalitarian monster; a commonsensical denial of the totalitarian character of this regime would have evoked violent protests. All attempts to stress the obvious weaknesses of the regime, or to compare it favourably with other regimes less advanced in de-totalitarianization, were treated as a betrayal of the holy cause of the anti-totalitarian crusade. Those who dared to challenge the anti-totalitarian orthodoxy had to be very careful to avoid outright ostracism and excommunication (a certain decline in their reputation and credibility was a penalty that could not be avoided). As we shall see, these three functions of the theory under discussion explain many aspects of the current political situation in Poland. I shall try to explicate this in the last part of the article.

### Radicals versus Reformers

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of post-Communist Poland is the omnipresent contradiction between the radical, uncompromisingly anti-Communist ideology and the principle of compromise which had enabled a smooth, peaceful transfer of political power.

The 'round-table agreements' of April 1989 contradicted the theory of 'new evolutionism'. They have shown that the ruling party was not monolithic, that its leadership understood the necessity of deep reforms, and that the price for such reforms could include not only 'liberalization' in the exercise of power but also genuine power-sharing. Of course, this was inexplicable in terms of the 'totalitarian model'. Neither could it be explained in terms of intransigently anti-totalitarian political pressure: the initiative for round-table talks came from the Party at a time when Solidarity was weaker than ever, facing a split within its ranks, trying to cope with waves of wildcat strikes and unable to embark on a political offensive. Both sides were acting under the pressure of the intolerable *economic* situation. The outcome of the 'round-table talks' can be described as an agreement between two political elites, pursuing different political aims but equally

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 266

interested in an 'anti-crisis pact' (Bronislaw Geremek's expression)—a pact that would enable them to carry out a marketization of the economy, and the austerity programme bound up with it, while tempering as much as possible the expressions of popular discontent. The Party agreed to a limited power-sharing, hoping thereby not only to ease internal conflicts and to improve its image but also, and above all, to share the burden of responsibility for the economic catastrophe. The mainstream Solidarity agreed to carry this burden, remembering the example of Spain and expecting a 'soft landing' in an unrestricted democracy. In this way, liberalizing authoritarianism gave way to a negotiated movement toward post-Communist pluralism.

It should be stressed that both sides of the agreement chose the policy of compromise against the will of the less moderate forces in their ranks. At a plenum of the PUWP Central Committee in January 1989, General Jaruzelski, Mieczyslaw Rakowski, Interior Minister Czeslaw Kiszczak, and the rest of the top Party leadership had to resort to the threat of resignation when the frightened hardliners tried to resist the proposed re-legalization of Solidarity. At the same time the old Solidarity radicals (Andrzej Gwiazda, Marian Jurczyk, Anna Walentynowicz) were accusing Walesa of tolerating the rise of a 'new class', composed of nomenklatura members, speculators and businessmen whose call for 'privatization' expressed the desire to enrich themselves at the expense of the workers. The idea of a 'political contract' with the Communists was rejected and ridiculed both on the right and on the left—by Leszek Moczulski's Confederation For Independent Poland (KPN) and by a new workers' party calling itself the Polish Socialist Party—Revolutionary Democracy (PPS-RD). During the 'round-table talks' in Warsaw, they organized in Jastrzebie (Silesia) a conference of all principal opponents to any compromise.

As is known, the further development went much beyond the 'round-table' compromise. At the beginning Solidarity seemed to feel embarrassed and even worried by the scope of its success. Some of its leaders, including Michnik, tried to console the losers by interpreting the elections (quite correctly) as a sort of national plebiscite in which the population voted for a unifying symbol and against Communism as such—that is, not for particular programmes and not against the reform-minded leaders of the Party. Soon political struggle resumed and gained momentum. With the formation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government, the transitional period from one-party rule to political pluralism—which in accordance with the round-table agreements was to last four years—was shortened to several weeks. Nevertheless, the original agreement concerning the office of the President was kept: General Jaruzelski was elected to this office with a majority of one vote. This gave rise to a controversy about the validity of other agreements. Prime Minister Mazowiecki declared that he wanted to be a moral politician, and that morality in politics meant for him (among other things) keeping one's promises. Jacek Kuron, the new Minister of Labour, took a different position, saying: 'Political agreements in which political forces divide power are not worth the paper they're written on. If an agreement is real, not fictitious, it is worth the

strength of the partners that sign it.<sup>27</sup> However, Kuron did not conclude from this that *all* round-table agreements were no longer binding. Such a conclusion was proclaimed from other quarters, representing mostly two groups of people: (1) right-wing or left-wing radicals, who opposed the round-table talks as such, and (2) those Solidarity leaders, or intellectual advisers of the union, who for some reason—political, personal, or purely accidental—had not been invited to join Mazowiecki's government.

This brings us closer to an understanding of the peculiar political situation that exists now in Poland. It is peculiar because the current political leadership emerged from a political contract with the Communist reformers whose political base drastically shrank soon afterwards. In other words, Mazowiecki's government consists of people who decided to join the round-table talks and who won the elections as candidates personally endorsed by Lech Walesa.<sup>28</sup> Thus it is arguable that the ruling elite was self-selected rather than democratically elected, and that this self-selection was acceptable for a transitional period but not as a political representation of a truly liberated Poland. It is also quite evident that the unprecedented concessions made at the round-table talks by the Communist side, as well as the possibility of appropriating the prestige and symbolic power of Solidarity, made 'Walesa's team' virtually invincible in the contest with other oppositional forces. Finally, it is equally clear that after the disappearance of its Communist partners, the ruling group, or rather the ruling coalition, monopolized political power, leaving little room for a genuinely pluralistic competition, and formulating ingenious arguments to defend this state of affairs. On the pages of *Tygodnik Solidarność*—a weekly publication increasingly critical of the government—Jadwiga Staniszkis defined it as an 'exclusive corporatism', setting against it an 'inclusive' variety.<sup>29</sup> Leaders of the political parties excluded from power-sharing, as well as the dissidents within Solidarity, bitterly resent their marginalization and refuse to acknowledge that Mazowiecki's government represents a truly independent Poland. As a rule, they attribute their exclusion from power to the influence of Communists, or ex-Communists, and consequently demand an intensification of the anti-Communist crusade (which, assuredly, could hardly lead to a genuine 'pluralization'). But the arguments of the government's supporters are often equally unconvincing, especially when resorting to the notion of 'unity'. Michnik, whose *Gazeta Wyborcza* often clashed with *Tygodnik Solidarność*, explained it thus: '[The] movement for emancipation and pluralism should be united. In present-day Poland, with the exception of Solidarity, there is little

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in B. Gwertzman and M. T. Kaufman, *The Collapse of Communism*, New York 1990, pp. 114–15.

<sup>28</sup> The electoral campaign in Poland was very characteristic in this respect: some electoral posters said simply that this or that candidate, quite irrespective of his or her political view, was 'not a candidate of Lech Walesa'. The candidates of the PUPP also tried to present themselves as friends of Walesa; the most fortunate were the ones who could provide photographs showing them in the company of the Pope.

<sup>29</sup> See Jadwiga Staniszkis, 'Grożba latynizacji', in *Tygodnik Solidarność*, no. 23, 10 November 1989, p. 3.



room, as yet, for other political parties or groups.<sup>30</sup> Zdzisław Najder (the former head of the Polish section of Radio Free Europe) added to this an explanation saying that the interests of the Poles were not differentiated enough to warrant their division into political parties<sup>31</sup> (an argument strangely reminiscent of the Stalinist view of the alleged lack of different class interests in the Soviet Union). At the same time, nobody challenges the existing pluralism *within* Walesa's Solidarity (that is, Solidarity without the groups which had split from it while retaining its name). Thus pluralism within Solidarity was seen as preferable to an unlimited political competition.

### 'The Family', 'The Retinue' and 'The Court'

A good guide to the inner divisions within Solidarity has been provided by Piotr Wierzbicki, an able right-wing journalist from *Tygodnik Solidarność* (whose book of 1985, entitled *Thoughts of an Old-fashioned Pole* enthusiastically praised Roman Dmowski, the chief ideologist of Polish nationalism of the beginning of the century, and advanced the idea of endowing Walesa with a semi-dictatorial power).<sup>32</sup> He has disclosed that the political establishment of Solidarity was divided into three circles, based mostly upon different networks of personal loyalties: 'The Family', 'The Retinue' and 'The Court'.<sup>33</sup>

'The Family' consists of the veterans of the democratic opposition of the seventies, ex-members of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR). Its main representatives are Bronisław Geremek, Jacek Kuron and Adam Michnik; their press organ is Michnik's *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Their heroic past endowed them with great influence and prestige. At the same time, however, the leaders of the group are seen as ex-revisionists, representatives of the post-Communist 'secular left' (*lewica laicka*). Despite many efforts, they have not gained the full confidence of the Church. In the eyes of the consistently anti-Communist majority they look suspiciously 'leftist' and soft on Communism. Being aware that representing the Left is not a political asset, they resort to a clever strategy: the argument that the notions of 'left' and 'right' have become obsolete, not applicable to the countries with totalitarian experience. Sometimes they present themselves as 'centrists', or even dress themselves in black and pose as conservatives. But, happily, the true right-wingers are able to unmask these leftists in disguise.<sup>34</sup>

The second group, 'The Retinue', is composed of members of Mazowiecki's cabinet; its press organ is the daily *Rzeczpospolita*, an official journal of the government. Its leaders are Catholics with impeccably

<sup>30</sup> Michnik, 'Does Socialism Have Any Future in Eastern Europe?', p. 184.

<sup>31</sup> Zdzisław Najder, 'Choroby pozorne i prawdziwe', *Tygodnik Solidarność*, no. 24, 17 November 1989, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> See Piotr Wierzbicki, *Mysli starszowieckiego Polaka*, London 1985 (first edition published underground in April 1985).

<sup>33</sup> Piotr Wierzbicki, 'Familia, Świta, Dwór', *Tygodnik Solidarność*, no. 23, 10 November 1989, pp. 1, 5.

<sup>34</sup> See Piotr Wierzbicki, 'Maska i frak', *Tygodnik Solidarność*, no. 2, 12 January 1990, p. 8.

anti-Communist credentials; politically, they represent a coalition of moderate nationalists, Christian Democrats and free-market liberals. All of them stand for political moderation, radical economic reform, rule of law, and a statesman-like approach to foreign policy.<sup>35</sup> Wierzbicki stressed that 'The Retinue', in contrast to 'The Family', was a group that emerged only recently and, therefore, could not have developed a clearly defined identity. We can see that for precisely this reason it was regarded by other groups as the proverbial 'lesser evil'. Thus, in November 1989, Jadwiga Staniszkis argued on the pages of *Tygodnik Solidarność* (in the same issue that Wierzbicki published his article on the three groups) that Mazowiecki's government contained the influence of 'The Family', and for that reason deserved support from other quarters.<sup>36</sup> A few months later Adam Michnik chose to side with Mazowiecki's government against its populist critics who demanded an 'acceleration' of political changes. He even dared to say that Mazowiecki would be a better candidate for the Presidency than Lech Wałęsa.<sup>37</sup>

The third group, 'The Court', consists of those activists who assembled around Wałęsa, pushing him to increase his personal power. Its organ is *Tygodnik Solidarność*—a weekly whose editing had previously been in Mazowiecki's hands and whose editorial board was arbitrarily changed by Wałęsa himself. Wierzbicki characterized its line as neither left, nor right.<sup>38</sup> Initially this was more or less true since the common denominator of 'The Court' was merely a critical attitude to 'those in power' and an ambition to break their 'political monopoly'.<sup>39</sup> With the passage of time, however, it turned out that the dominant position within the group belonged to right-wing nationalistic populists, seeing everywhere the influence of a mythologized 'left' and advocating a semi-authoritarian solution. A manifesto of this trend is Wierzbicki's article in support of a strong 'presidential system', with Wałęsa as a Polish General de Gaulle. Only such a system, according to the author, could save Poland from the monopolistic rule of an (allegedly) all-powerful leftist coterie.<sup>40</sup>

*Tygodnik Solidarność* is a very revealing source. It discloses the ideas and aims of an influential group that sees itself as an alternative to the present political establishment. It is important, therefore, to pay due attention to its political line. In a programmatic article, 'Independence First', Krzysztof Czapanski defined the aim of the group as unrestricted national independence. This meant for him nothing less than a wholesale change of Poland's place in Europe: withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and Comecon, economic integration with the West,

<sup>35</sup> An important role is played among them by Aleksander Hall, leader of moderate nationalists, whose ministry deals with the government's relations with political parties.

<sup>36</sup> See Staniszkis, 'Groźba latynizacji'.

<sup>37</sup> See Russell Watson et al., 'Doubts About Wałęsa', *Newsweek*, 23 April 1990, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> Wierzbicki, 'Familia, Świca, Dwór', p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> At least one of the publicists of 'The Court', Wojciech Giełkynski, could be classified as a moderate leftist.

<sup>40</sup> Piotr Wierzbicki, 'Jutro w Belwederze, czyli pochwała rządów prezydenckich', *Tygodnik Solidarność*, no. 12, 23 March 1990, p. 17.

setting hopes not on Gorbachev's perestroika but on the downfall of the Soviet Empire. Any delay in realizing these objectives, Czabanski warned, would entail a dangerous alienation of the younger generation, deeply disappointed with the pro-Soviet policy of Mazowiecki's government. The danger of economic pauperization is relatively unimportant since the Poles are ready to pay any price for ceasing to be a part of the East. They want to be Europeans, even if this would give them only the status of 'Gastarbeiters of the West', a 'cinderella of Europe'.<sup>41</sup> The internal aspect of the 'full independence programme' would consist in radically breaking all constraints imposed by round-table agreements, making Walesa a 'strong President' and creating more room for right-wing political parties. To prevent the fragmentation of political power, the major role should be played by a 'Presidential party', based upon Solidarity's Citizens' Committees and similar to the prewar Non-Party Bloc for Cooperation with the Government.<sup>42</sup>

The concrete implementation of this programme has been discussed in many other articles. The main line of the proposed policies boils down to the following: (1) Forcing General Jaruzelski to resign, since 'the author of the martial law' cannot be a President of a truly independent Poland.<sup>43</sup> (2) Quicker and more consistent action against the former members of the nomenklatura, aiming at a radical change of managerial, administrative and diplomatic cadres. (3) Radicalization of the economic reform. The Finance Minister, Leszek Balcerowicz, deserves criticism from the right, for yielding too much to the left and trying to save too much from the old system.<sup>44</sup> (4) Ending the policy of reconciliation with the ex-Communist reformers, this seen as bringing about moral disarmament. Martial law can never be forgiven; all perpetrators of 'Communist crimes' must be brought to justice.<sup>45</sup> (5) Ending all manner of 'special relations' with the Soviet Union. The Soviet troops stationed in Poland should be treated as an occupying army; Prime Minister Mazowiecki (and Michnik's *Gazeta Wyborcza*) committed a stupendous error by treating it as a guarantor of Poland's western border.<sup>46</sup> The anti-Soviet feelings of the population are natural and should not be feared or suppressed. Thus, for instance, the vandalizing of Soviet cemeteries in Poland should be seen as a delayed reaction to the mass destruction of Polish cemeteries, graves and commemorative plaques in the Soviet Union.<sup>47</sup> (6) Distancing oneself from Mazowiecki's government, since the triangle 'Mazowiecki-Gemerek-Jaruzelski'

<sup>41</sup> Krzysztof Czabanski, 'Najpierw niepodległość', *Tygodnik Solidarności*, no. 13, 30 March 1990, pp. 1, 16.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> See Krzysztof Czabanski, 'Dlaczego Jaruzelski musi odejść?' *Tygodnik Solidarności*, no. 12, 23 March 1990, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> J. Maziarz, 'A jeśli nie wyjdzie?' *Tygodnik Solidarności*, no. 2, 12 January 1990, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, P. Sawed, 'Już nie potrafię...', *Tygodnik Solidarności*, no. 12, 23 March 1990, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> See A.K., 'Okupują czy chronią?', *Tygodnik Solidarności*, no. 9, 2 March 1990, p. 7. *Gazeta Wyborcza* (14 February 1990) published an article by Janusz Reiter, claiming that the presence of Soviet troops in Poland can be used as an asset in Poland's future talks with united Germany.

<sup>47</sup> C. Chlebowski, 'Kto sieje wiatr...', *Tygodnik Solidarności*, no. 12, 23 March 1990, pp. 10-11.

represents only the forces of the Left. Mazowiecki's 'Retinue' should no longer be regarded as a possible ally against 'The Family'; in fact it turned out to be dominated by the 'Catholic Left' and fully accommodated itself to the policies of the 'Secular Left'.<sup>48</sup> (7) Finally, the need for 'pluralization' of the Polish political landscape by creating more room for those parties outside Solidarity that advocate more radical means of political struggle. To achieve this end, the elections to self-governmental bodies (to be held at the end of May) should proceed in accordance with a proportional, and not majoritarian, electoral law.<sup>49</sup> The danger of giving a chance to ex-Communists could be prevented by the united efforts of all anti-Communists, while the strengthening of independent, radically anti-Communist forces (like L. Moczulski's KPP, or Gwiazda's 'Workers' Group')<sup>50</sup> would help Solidarity's right wing break the 'monopoly of the Left'.

The last postulate is quite understandable. After all, the group's programme of 'Independence First' is fully consistent with Moczulski's ideas, while its criticism of the internal policies of the government has much in common with Gwiazda's extremism.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the publicists of 'The Court' do not seem able to succeed in creating conditions for a genuine pluralism on the right. Pluralism of opinions may be unlimited, but pluralism in power-sharing is another question. Walesa made it clear that he did not want too much power for political forces outside Solidarity; he wants Poland with 'two legs', the right leg and the left one, but both within the bounds of his control, as the newly re-elected president of Solidarity. At the Second National Congress of Solidarity (April 1990) he refused to see Solidarity's dissidents, and made some bluntly critical comments about the inefficiency of too much pluralism and overly democratic procedures.<sup>52</sup> The fact that Prime Minister Mazowiecki felt it proper to declare at the Congress his unbending loyalty to Solidarity (as if apologizing for the independent line of his government), and that his Finance Minister, Balcerowicz, had to defend his economic reform against sharp criticism from the delegates,<sup>53</sup> shows that the union sees itself as the victorious political force, legitimate 'kingmaker', and the representative of the entire nation. And it is now evident that Walesa, despite all his caveats, wants to keep political power: either indirectly, as the president

<sup>48</sup> Wierzbicki, 'Maska i frak', p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> See A. Szczepiński, 'Ordynacja nowego typu', *Tygodnik Solidarność*, no. 11, 16 March 1990, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> See footnote 14 above.

<sup>51</sup> Note Gwiazda's political credo 'We are fighting a war for Poland, for Poland's future, and for the liquidation of Communism. No one has the right to give up the struggle, because it is in the fundamental interest of Polish society. What the world thinks about us and our situation is unimportant. It doesn't matter why they admire us or what role for us they have in mind.' See 'Ready For Anything. An Interview with Andrzej Gwiazda', *Stanisław Papers*, vol. XIII, no. 4, October 1989, p. 211. We must remember, of course, that Gwiazda's radicalism is more extreme than any standpoint within the present Solidarity. He adamantly opposed the round-table talks and accused Walesa of political betrayal.

<sup>52</sup> See 'Walesa powtórnie wybrany', *Dziennik Żywiecki* (Polish Daily Zgoda), Chicago, 23 April 1990, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>53</sup> See S. Engelberg, 'Planner of Free Market in Poland Is Under Fire', *New York Times*, 24 April 1990, p. A7.

of Solidarity to whom any government would be ultimately answerable, or directly, as the President of the Republic of Poland. Whether Walesa's ambitions could be satisfied—that is, whether he and his 'Court' could seize the dominant position in Polish political life—is another question. His drive for the Presidency did not improve his image; on the contrary, the number of people seeing him as an unpredictable, authoritarian and even somewhat megalomaniac person has greatly increased in the last months. Overall, Walesa's popularity has fallen by one third and Mazowiecki's popularity is now higher. Michnik is not alone in regarding today's Prime Minister as the best candidate for the next President of Poland.<sup>34</sup>

It must be stressed that this trend should not be attributed to a mythological strength of the Polish Left. It seems rather to be caused by the steadily increasing influence of the responsible, politically moderate Right, as opposed to populist and demagogic right-wing radicalism. Influential members of Mazowiecki's 'Retinue', such as Leszek Balcerowicz and Tadeusz Syryjczyk (neo-liberals), Andrzej Stelmachowski (a Christian Democrat), or Aleksander Hall (a moderate nationalist), represent different variants of this broad current of political opinion; Mazowiecki himself is also a moderate Christian Democrat, deeply disappointed with the ideological blueprints of the Left (his links with 'left-wing Catholicism', as a position in theology and ecclesiology, opposed to that of traditional clerical conservatism, is a different matter). By political moderation I mean here not a lack of clearness in choosing political ends, but a conscious avoidance of confrontationist means and (especially) ideological crusades. In this respect, Polish moderate right-wingers have always been more rational, and also much more tolerant, than the excessively ideological, emotion-driven radicals, of both the Right and Left (Michnik included).<sup>35</sup> Let

<sup>34</sup> See D. Pasent, 'Mazowiecki na prezydenta', *Polityka*, no. 16, 21 April 1990, p. 16. One should add to this that Solidarity now has only two million members—only a little more than one fifth of its membership of 1981—while Alfred Miodowicz's All-Polish Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ), the so-called 'class trade unions', allied formerly to the PUPP, claims a membership of six million.

<sup>35</sup> One of the best examples of a humanitarian and tolerant right-winger was the late Miroslaw Dzielski (1941–89), founder of the Industrial Society of Cracow and the chief theorist of Hayekian liberalism in Poland. Wierzbicki praised his ideas as 'first-rate intellectual achievements' of the Polish Right, but failed to notice that his political recommendations were completely different from those of *Tygodnik Solidarność*. See Wierzbicki, 'Maska i frak', p. 9. In sharp contrast to the radicals from Walesa's 'Court', Dzielski propagated a 'constructive anti-Communism', capable of combating the Communist system without endangering the personal interest of individuals bound up with it, making sure that its aim is to change them, rather than to destroy them; hence, the so-called 'enfranchisement of the nomenklatura' was from his point of view a positive process. Analogously, Dzielski was not hostile to the Soviet Union; he wished Gorbachev well and wanted to help his perestroika. He even defined himself as a Russophile, seeing the liberalized and 'civilized' Russia of the future as a powerful state, exercising a 'natural hegemony' in a politically neutral Europe. See Miroslaw Dzielski, 'Polityka polska dziś', 13. *Pismo chrześcijańsko-liberalne*, no. 12, published underground, Kraków, 30 December 1986, pp. 1–13. Needless to say, Dzielski was extremely critical of the 'anti-totalitarian crusaders', both of the left and right. He saw them as sad examples of ideological blindness, unable and unwilling to understand the changes in the Communist world. For more details about Dzielski, see my article 'Liberalism in Poland', *Critical Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, Winter 1988, pp. 8–38.

us move on now to the fate of the other side of the round-table agreements.

### The Demise of the PUWP

It is now obvious that the Polish Communist reformers greatly overestimated their chance to survive and win popular support. The elections of 4 June 1989 brought a sweeping victory to Solidarity: it won all that was up for competitive election to the Diet (namely, a full 35 per cent of the seats—38 per cent were reserved for the PUWP, and the rest for its allies) and 99 out of 100 seats in the Senate. Unexpectedly for all sides, the voters also eliminated the majority of the top Party reformers who had chosen to run unopposed from the so-called 'national list' but failed to predict that their names could be simply crossed out. The rank-and-file members of Solidarity, as well as students and many other groups, strongly protested against Jaruzelski's candidacy for the office of President (as a result he was elected by the smallest possible majority). Another chief reformer, the Interior Minister, General Kiszczak (who was in fact the main architect of the round-table talks), succeeded in becoming Prime Minister but proved unable to form an acceptable cabinet. The way out of this impasse was found by forming a coalition government with a Solidarity Prime Minister, the Peasant Party and the Democratic Party (former allies of the PUWP) allied to Solidarity, and with the reform-minded leaders of the PUWP retaining authority over the army and security forces (for reasons of both external and internal control). In this manner Mazowiecki's cabinet came into being.

From the point of view of all those who believed that the old political elite could adjust itself to the changes and become an important part of the new political establishment, the further developments were truly disastrous. The secretary-general of the PUWP, M.F. Rakowski (himself a reformer but strongly disliked in the oppositional circles for his relative toughness) proved unable to impose discipline on his Party's representation in the Diet. The Party deputies, intimidated by anti-Communist moods and seeing Mazowiecki as the 'lesser evil', did not dare to assume an oppositional stand, sheepishly submitting themselves to the will of majority; their leader, Professor Marian Orzechowski (who cannot be suspected of inadequate knowledge of the history of Communism) even proclaimed that it would have been impossible for Communists to oppose the will of the nation. A spark of hope appeared for the Party when Walesa agreed to meet Rakowski, to speak with him in a friendly way, and to express support for his aim of transforming the PUWP into a social-democratic party. Their meeting (shown on television) aroused, however, a wave of criticism, which forced Walesa to withdraw this qualified support (he backed instead Tadeusz Fiszbach, who as the former regional secretary in Gdansk had to his credit a friendly cooperation with Solidarity in the early period of its existence). At the last Congress of the PUWP (held in January 1990) the Party dissolved itself, and most of its leaders (including Rakowski) gave up further political careers. The leadership of the new party, calling itself Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP), was put into the hands of younger leaders (its chairman

is Aleksander Kwasniewski, its secretary-general, Leszek Miller, both in their early forties); the structure of the party was thoroughly changed, breaking ostentatiously with the Leninist principle of 'democratic centralism', giving the fullest possible autonomy to its local organizations, and warmly encouraging the formation of different factions. As to ideological change, it amounted to an outright and total abandonment of Communism—embracing parliamentary democracy and a market economy, national will as the only legitimation of power, identification with the Polish *socialist* tradition and with the *Socialist* International, and no single mention of Communism or Marxism (let alone Leninism).<sup>36</sup> It was probably hoped that all these changes would give 'credibility' to the new party and enable the former members of the PUWP to find a socially acceptable place in 'post-Communist' reality.<sup>37</sup> If so, the outcome can only be described as a total failure. After four months of its existence, the SdRP has only 60,000 members (while the membership of the PUWP was two million). Its members are seen as Communists who have not really changed but merely 'repainted' themselves. Its activities arouse hostile comments, and even organized demonstrations of hostility. Powerful pressure from below prevents the Solidarity-led government recognizing the newly made Social Democrats as a loyal left-wing opposition, with a legitimate place in the new system. A rival 'post-Communist' party, Fiszbach's Social-Democratic Union (the so-called 'Uniates'), fared only a little better, but has a membership of just three thousand. Most former members of the PUWP do not identify with the SdRP and try to remain apolitical. Some of them wanted the creation of a 'neo-Communist' party,<sup>38</sup> but did not dare to carry this idea into effect.

It should be stressed that Kwasniewski's elevation to the leadership of the SdRP owed much to the support of Adam Michnik. The two leaders met at the University of Poznań and engaged, before the television cameras, in a polite political discussion on the topic of 'European political culture'. Michnik openly stated that at the present moment, when the leadership of the PUWP had surrendered its power and thus shown its concern for the avoidance of national catastrophe, to saturate political life with anti-Communist hatred was a short-sighted action, endangering the prospects of a genuine, European-style democracy. Asked about the criteria of 'Europeanness', the two leaders paid compliments to each other: Kwasniewski called Michnik 'an exemplary European', and the latter reciprocated by calling Kwasniewski 'a man who had civilized the PUWP'.<sup>39</sup> However, the

<sup>36</sup> See 'Deklaracja Socjaldemokracji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej', *Trybuna*, no. 4, 1990, p. 4; and 'Statut Socjaldemokracji Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej', accepted by the founding Congress on 28 January 1990, *ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>37</sup> The term 'post-Communist' is used here as a purely conventional label. Strictly speaking, a society which had not yet experienced the Communist stage (and never claimed to have achieved it), could not be 'post-Communist'. This remark applies to all so-called 'Communist' and 'post-Communist' countries, including the USSR.

<sup>38</sup> I owe this information to Professor Jerzy Wiatr, a member of the Main Council (*Rada Narodowa*, a democratized equivalent of the Central Committee) of the SdRP.

<sup>39</sup> See E. Bosacka, 'Kwasniewski kontra Michnik, czyli rzecz o wskrzeszaniu', *Kontak*, March 1990, pp. 33–7. Like almost all emigré publications, *Kontak* is increasingly critical of Michnik's political line.

consequences of this exchange greatly differed from expectations. Michnik became a target of nasty comments, defining him as an inveterate leftist; his group within the establishment ('The Family') was seen as willing to compromise with the 'post-Communist' Left, which gave rise to an organized campaign against it, orchestrated by Walesa's 'Court'. Kwasniewski became the chairman of the SdRP but found himself in a political void: Michnik's support alienated from him many potential followers from the ranks of former PUWP members, without compensating for this loss by a visible improvement of the public image of his party.

### Intensifying the Crusade

Thus, the dissolution of the PUWP and the transformation of part of it into a social-democratic party did not restrain the 'anti-Communist' crusade. On the contrary: anti-Communist radicals, both within and outside Solidarity, felt threatened by the prospect of a post-Communist Left gaining 'credibility' and forming a stable alliance with the moderate forces dominating the present government. Hence, they intensified their anti-Communist crusade, combining it with a campaign against the Left (real and imagined) as a whole, and with a growing critical stand towards Mazowiecki's cabinet, as being, allegedly, too 'leftist' and, therefore, not sufficiently anti-Communist. This explains the position of *Tygodnik Solidarność* (whose editor-in-chief, Jarosław Kaczyński, is now, unfortunately, the chief adviser to Lech Walesa) and the aims of all those who urge Walesa to run for the Presidency.<sup>60</sup> The standards of 'European political culture', as advocated by Michnik, are obviously alien to these people. They protest against the alleged 'monopoly of power' not in the name of a genuine pluralism; they want only a shift to the right within Solidarity and hope to create thereby 'a stable system'.<sup>61</sup> Most of them demand therefore 'an opening to the right', that is, a greater role for the various anti-Communist extremists, but nobody among them cares to remember that pluralism should not be restricted to the winning side, that democracy should involve both some respect and legitimate channels of activity for political losers. The view that the SdRP should not be artificially isolated and contained is seen by them as an unacceptable concession to 'repainted Communists'. There is no doubt that more consistent support for pluralism, claiming political tolerance even for those former PUWP members who have *not* fully rejected their previous ideological and personal loyalties, would arouse their indignation, as a morally condemnable tolerance of 'totalitarianism'.

<sup>60</sup> Thus, in turn, explains Michnik's opposition to Walesa's candidacy for the presidential office. The conflict between Walesa and 'The Family' seems to be in an advanced stage. An article on the Solidarity Congress contains information that a part of the Presidium of the OKP (Citizen's Parliamentary Club, headed by B. Geremek) opposed Walesa's candidacy for the post of Solidarity's Chairman, setting against it the candidacy of Władysław Frasyniuk. If so, a half-hidden conflict has entered the phase of open war. See J. Wilczak, 'Kadencja przedłużona', *Polityka*, no. 16, 21 April 1990, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> See Kaczyński's words quoted in A. Chełko, 'Granice Solidarności', *Polityka*, no. 16, 21 April 1990, p. 4.



An important part of the campaign against the moderates (disguised as a campaign against the 'Communists' and 'leftists') is a concentrated attack on the government's policies toward the former nomenklatura. Mazowiecki's cabinet is constantly under fire for being (allegedly) too lenient, willing to forget the past and to keep the promises given to the Communist reformers at the round table. This demagogic criticism finds, of course, an easy acceptance among the workers who deeply resent the fact that many directors and managers (usually former PUWP members) fare much better under Balcerowicz's reform than themselves.<sup>62</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that as a rule populist audiences confuse the reforms with the purge of the old cadres, and for that reason accuse the government reformers of being too slow and inconsistent. (Otherwise such accusations would make no sense at all.) Many grassroots supporters of capitalism behave as if Polish capitalists should be democratically elected, with recommendations from Solidarity, as a reward for their work for the union. The success of the reforms is made dependent on the distribution of punishments for the past activities that brought about the economic crisis. (Thus, for instance, the Gdansk shipyard workers demanded the punishment of M.F. Rakowski whom they saw as responsible for all the misfortunes of their shipyard.<sup>63</sup>) Walesa in the role of a future President is expected to be 'a man with a big whip', forcing the government to do its work without leniency.<sup>64</sup> Walesa himself has endorsed this in the following words: 'You want me to rule. If I take power, and I am capable of taking it into my hands, I would demand decrees, tribunals, and such prerogatives that would liquidate this entire mess and settle accounts with the culprits, in accordance with justice.'<sup>65</sup>

It would be a mistake to conclude from this that Mazowiecki's government is totally immune to populist pressure. It is not, and this accounts for the inconsistencies in its policies, which are often quite glaring. In an 'Open Letter' to Walesa, Józef Kuśmierek, a journalist with great merits in disclosing the economic absurdities of the 'old system', revealed that the scope of the current purge among the industrial managers could be compared to the Stalinist purges of 1948–50.<sup>66</sup> There have been no repressions as yet, but one can hardly talk about too much lenience and forgiveness. Leszek Miller, the secretary-general of the SdRP, had certainly many reasons to complain that former members of the PUWP were discriminated against everywhere.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See Walesa's complaints about the income of some directors of the Gdansk shipyard—those of them who (despite being ex-members of the nomenklatura) have become shareholders of Western companies. See 'Reformy są zbyt powolne', *Dziennik Zwyczajny*, 24 April 1990, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> See the report from a meeting in the Gdansk shipyard of 10 April 1990, 'Walesa potwierdza', *Dziennik Zwyczajny*, 11 April 1990, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* (The quoted words belong to K. Puzs, the secretary of Walesa's personal staff.)

<sup>65</sup> Walesa's speech at the meeting with the farmers of Pruszcz Gdański, as reported in *Polityka*, no. 13, 14 April 1990, p. 2 ('W Kraju').

<sup>66</sup> See 'W Kraju', *Polityka*, no. 14, 17 April 1990, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Miller's complaints about it have been quoted in J. Sądecki, 'Aparat w odwrocie', *Tygodnik Solidarności*, no. 13, 30 March 1990, pp. 1, 17. Interestingly, the author concedes that the former members of the nomenklatura are completely de-ideologized and ready to serve the new government loyally (*ibid.*, p. 17).

A good illustration of this is provided by the fate of the RSW 'Prasa' (Workers' Publishing Cooperative, 'the Press'), a powerful concern belonging previously to the PUWP and recently dissolved by Parliament: its former employees are, reportedly, unable to find jobs anywhere.<sup>68</sup>

A particularly sensitive issue is, of course, General Kiszczak's Interior Ministry, especially its Security Police. A general purge in this ministry has been started only recently, with the nomination of Krzysztof Kozłowski, a Catholic journalist, to the post of deputy minister. Michnik's *Gazeta Wyborcza* tried to extenuate this action by recalling Kiszczak's merits in paving the way for the 'round table';<sup>69</sup> as might have been expected, this aroused only a wave of spiteful comments about the 'bonds of mutual loyalty' between the two sides of the round-table talks.<sup>70</sup> The fact that the majority of the secret police had already been directed to serve in the ordinary police, and that the remaining functionaries declared their willingness to serve the new regime loyally, had no influence on the outcome. Parliament resolved that no member of the former secret police can be employed by police forces, and thus twenty-four thousand qualified functionaries found themselves jobless.

K.T. Toeplitz, a columnist from *Polityka*, questioned the wisdom of such resolutions by pointing out that the rapid increase in the number of embittered 'superfluous people' was politically dangerous.<sup>71</sup> A confirmation of this diagnosis came a few days later, when the press reported the case of a fatal fire in the apartment of a journalist who specialized in hostile articles about the former security officers.<sup>72</sup> The suspicion of arson caused an emotional turmoil at the Solidarity Congress, and a resolution condemning the Interior Ministry was immediately proposed. Adam Michnik bravely objected to this course of action, stressing that there was no proof of the Ministry's alleged wrongdoing.<sup>73</sup> He could have added that a wholesale condemnation of the Ministry would not prevent more terroristic acts in the future.

A good summary of the current situation has been provided by the Polish 'Ombudsman', Professor Ewa Łętowska. In a recent interview she said: 'I think that we must decide whether we make a revolution in this country, or deal with an evolutionary process. I can easily imagine both situations, although I implement the evolutionary model. In revolutionary conditions we must immediately suspend the institution of 'Ombudsman', the Constitutional Tribunal and the Chief Administrative Tribunal.'<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See KTT (Toeplitz), 'Ludzie zbędni', *Polityka*, no. 16, 21 April 1990, p. 16

<sup>69</sup> See *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 19 February 1990, as quoted by J. Prokop in 'Wrok po Magdalenie', *Kultura*, no. 4, 1990, p. 101.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> See Toeplitz, 'Ludzie zbędni'

<sup>72</sup> See P. S. Engelberg, 'Polish Police Accused in a Fatal Fire', *New York Times*, 23 April 1990, p. A6.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> E. Łętowska, An Interview with T.J. Musiał, in *Wprost*, 8 April 1990, as quoted in *Polityka*, no. 16, 21 April 1990, p. 2 ('Opinie').

Indeed: a programme of firmly establishing the rule of law is incompatible with a revolution. The fact that an overwhelming majority of Poles do not want a violent, bloody revolution should not mislead us: very often the same people support a 'creeping revolution', advocated by all sorts of populist radicals (including the increasingly influential right wing of Solidarity). The government tries to steer Poland toward 'normal' liberal democracy but seems unable to check the increasingly dangerous campaign against the Communists, ex-Communists, 'repainted Communists', all real and potential leftists and, ultimately, all advocates of a truly evolutionary change;<sup>75</sup> a campaign having little in common with the liberal-democratic political culture. Pragmatically speaking, the government's difficulties in dealing with its populist critics are quite understandable. We can even concede that it may be better that populist anger can still be directed against various scapegoats, and thus turned away from the painful social costs of Balcerowicz's reform.<sup>76</sup> But in the long run, too much indulgence, too much timidity in defending the moderate, liberal-democratic option, may cause irreparable harm.

Instead of a conclusion, let me return briefly to the anti-totalitarian theory of the 'new evolutionism'. Adam Michnik, one of the main authors and practitioners of this theory, is now seen by many Poles to be too soft on ex-Communists and too critical of the populist radicals. However, it seems justified to say that his own ideas have helped to create this situation. The theory of 'new evolutionism' treated post-Stalinist Communists as convinced totalitarians who make concessions only under external pressure. Communism was defined as identical with totalitarianism and thus completely immune to *internal* change. Hence, all changes had to be regarded as 'enforced' by the opposition. This view helped the opposition to mobilize all its forces against the mythologized enemy. But it led also to the logical conclusion that Communists could not really change, that all political gains had to be attributed to an uncompromising struggle, and that the so-called Communist reformers deserved no credit for their materialization. In other words, the theory of 'new evolutionism' was a theory of an anti-Communist radicalism; a theory of peaceful *revolution*, not of a genuine evolution. For many people it was psychologically possible to embrace it at the stage of struggle and to abandon it silently at the stage of victory. But one should not be surprised that its main tenets are now being used by populist radicals who direct them not only against ex-Communists but also against liberal democrats. This only

<sup>75</sup> The number of these scapegoats has recently been increased by the re-emergence of the traditional populist scapegoat—the Jews. During the Solidarity Congress a small but well-organized group noisily demonstrated against the 'Jewish influence' in Poland, especially against Prime Minister Mazowiecki (who despite his Catholicism was classified as 'a Jew'). See 'Walca powrótnie wybrany', *Dziennik Zwyczajowy*, 23 April 1990, p. 1. (During the election campaign the Bishop of Płock felt it prudent to assure the potential voters that Mazowiecki's family had been duly Catholic since the fifteenth century. He said this in Mazowiecki's presence, but the latter failed to respond in an adequate way.)

<sup>76</sup> An article in *Polityka* describes families suffering from Balcerowicz's reform but attributing all their troubles to the plots of the mythologized nomenklatura. See B. Pieńkiewicz, 'Szyjka przednia sprasowana', *Polityka*, no. 16, 21 April 1990, p. 6.

shows that its ethos of intransigence has outlived its usefulness for the cause of 'European political culture'.

May 1990

## Postscript

It seems proper to indicate briefly in what sense the present article (written in May 1990 and published here without changes) might be regarded as relevant for the understanding of the recent presidential election in Poland.

The third part of the article ('Radicals versus Reformers') seems to be relevant as an analysis of the views of those people who for the entire year attacked Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government with an ever-increasing bitterness, urging Lech Walesa to strive for the Presidency and presenting themselves as candidates for the 'presidential party', that is, as a right-wing alternative to the existing political establishment. It is now clear that Walesa's presidential campaign should be traced back to his controversial decision to make Jarosław Kaczyński the editor-in-chief of *Tygodnik Solidarność*. Under this new editor (the former one was Mazowiecki), *Tygodnik Solidarność* quickly distanced itself from the government and formulated its own political programme (the one I have outlined above). In this way it prepared the ground for further steps, such as splitting Solidarity into the Centre Alliance (Walesa's followers) and the Civic Movement-Democratic Action (ROAD, a coalition supporting Mazowiecki); Walesa's call for 'acceleration'; and, finally, forcing the government to hold the presidential election before elections to Parliament, and before defining the presidential prerogatives in a new constitution.

It is evident that Balcerowicz's 'shock therapy' created social tensions that greatly undermined the popularity of Mazowiecki's team. In normal conditions a widespread dissatisfaction with right-wing policies would have strengthened the forces of the Left. If Poland is to become a genuine liberal democracy, its political system needs above all a left-wing opposition—loyal and responsible, but not intimidated and deliberately marginalized. However, the prevailing intellectual climate in Poland—analysed in the first two parts of my article—made such an outcome politically impossible. The electoral campaign moved Poland further toward the Radical Right, and only a small minority dared openly to criticize the government's record from the left. Adam Michnik, otherwise the most outspoken critic of Walesa's Centre Alliance, preferred to present himself as a champion of 'European' values and to conceptualize the right-wing threat as 'moving away from Europe'.

Mazowiecki's defeat (he received only 18 per cent of the vote) was spectacular, but Walesa's success (less than 40 per cent in the first round) was only relative. It has been achieved at the expense of Solidarity, which no longer exists both as a unified political movement and a meaningful unifying symbol. The split within its ranks has been

perceived by the 'man in the street' as a personal quarrel, irrelevant to his everyday economic problems. This explains the electoral appeal of Mr Stanislaw Tyminski, a previously unknown emigré entrepreneur who appeared as the embodiment of a successful 'self-made man', while at the same time challenging the Solidarity establishment as a whole. (This enabled him to collect in the first round 23 per cent of the vote—much more than the premier.) The moral of Tyminski's story is, I think, a clear warning that the Polish 'man in the street' (including a large proportion of the workers) is less and less willing to support politicians merely because of their past merits in the struggle against 'totalitarianism'. This means that Kaczynski's plan of offering the workers a merely 'moral' satisfaction—by removing the former nomenklatura members from their jobs—while at the same time promoting the rise of an affluent and politically consolidated new middle class, has a rather meagre chance of success. (For details of this rather cynical plan, see the interview with Jaroslaw Kaczynski in *Le Figaro*, 31 July 1990.) It is not out of the question, I hope, that the new President, who is after all a man of common sense, will understand this and not put Poland's fate into the hands of a self-appointed and self-seeking 'presidential party'.

Walesa's inauguration ceremony, which took place on 22 December, was intended to symbolize Poland's victory over Communism. General Jaruzelski was not invited to take part; instead, the President-elect received the insignia of presidential power from the emigré president, Ryszard Kaczorowski. Thus Poland returned symbolically to 1939, and the Polish People's Republic was reduced to a legal non-entity. Most Poles apparently applauded this, although for many years the very idea of such an outcome would have been dismissed as a surrealistic fantasy. Nevertheless, the wisdom of this radical step can be questioned not only from pro-Communist positions. It was not an act of national reconciliation, but a triumphalist gesture. Many people failed to realize that it implied reducing all forms of intrasystemic activity in People's Poland to a sort of collaboration with an illegal government. It does not seem likely that such an act would have been supported in a free, popular referendum. And it is arguable that a decision of this nature should have been discussed and voted on by Parliament. Unfortunately this was not the case.

December 1990

## Why Is the United States at War with Iraq?

Why is the United States at war with Iraq? It is a lot easier to say what are *not* the reasons for US intervention in the Gulf than to provide a fully satisfactory account of its presence there. According to the Bush administration, the USA is fighting Iraq because Saddam Hussein is a ruthless tyrant who has carried out an unjust invasion of Kuwait. In the pompous rhetoric of the President's State of the Union address, 'What is at stake is . . . a new world order—where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind: peace and security, freedom and the rule of law . . . Saddam Hussein's unprovoked invasion . . . will not stand.' It is important to take the administration's rhetoric seriously, because what might be called its empirical premisses are, in one respect, obviously correct. Saddam Hussein *is* a ruthless tyrant and his invasion of Kuwait must be condemned. Popular support in the USA for the administration's war is based, to an important degree, on the perceived nature of the Iraqi regime and, above all, the injustice of his invasion. For this reason, the

peace movement has the task of showing that, although the public's perception and judgment of the Iraqi regime and its invasion is not in error, nevertheless the US intervention could not be more wrong. This is, most relevantly, because US action is in no way motivated by Saddam's awful regime or his violation of democratic rights, and will only make things much worse for the people of the region and of the United States itself.

The war with Iraq is not at all like that with Vietnam. The Vietnamese were fighting for self-determination against US neocolonialism. That is obviously not the position of Iraq, which has sought to secure for itself something of a hegemonic position in the region. In general, the US Left must rid itself of the long-held but debilitating illusion that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. This could not be *less* true in the present case, for the Iraqi regime's accomplishments include the systematic physical extermination of virtually the entire Iraqi Left.

More positively, if the US Left is to take advantage of the present conjuncture to begin to rebuild itself and acquire a mass base after more than a decade of precipitate decline, it must associate itself systematically and unambiguously with the defence of democratic rights. In the present case, this means opposing the forceful imposition of one regime on another people (which does not, of course, mean ignoring the repressive character of the Kuwaiti and Saudi regimes). The failure of much of the US Left to stand unambiguously for the right of self-determination has in too many cases allowed right-wing forces to assume to themselves the mantle of leadership in the struggle for national rights. The most recent case of this was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, about which much of the Left was ambiguous—or, worse, sided with the Soviet Union in the name of 'progress' against Islamic reaction. Unfortunately, of course, the Soviet invasion, as well as the apologies of much of the US Left for it, only helped solidify the association of national oppression with the Left, and the association of leadership in the struggle for national liberation with the Right, thereby strengthening the Islamic reactionaries throughout the region and discrediting the Left.

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\* The following is the written-up text of a talk given at the UCLA Moratorium on the Iraq War, held on 24 January. This was a day devoted to considering the war, made possible by a mass student occupation of the administration building the previous week, in which over one hundred protesters were arrested. The author has benefited a great deal from ongoing discussion and political collaboration throughout the crisis with Perry Anderson, and wishes to thank him for all his help. He also wishes to thank Ellen Wood, Jon Wiener and Robin Blackburn for reading the text and offering invaluable criticisms and comments. Finally, he wishes to express his gratitude to his comrades in Solidarity and in the UCLA Radical Student Alliance. There are no footnotes because of the nature of the piece and because all information given here is derived from standard, easily available sources. Those who wish to find out about documentation are welcome to contact the author directly. The author has found particularly helpful the following articles: Michael Klare, 'Policing the Gulf and the World', *The Nation*, 15 October 1990; Justin Schwartz, 'This Gun's for Hire', *Against the Current*, new series, no. 30, January–February 1991; and Thomas Friedman's debunking of the administration's rationale for its policy, which appeared on the front page of the *New York Times*, 12 August 1990. On the recent history of the Kurds' struggle for independence, see Mohammed Malek, 'Kurdistan in the Middle East Conflict', *NLR* 175, May–June 1989, pp. 79–94.

Of course, while conceding the odious nature of Saddam's regime and its violation of democratic rights, the peace movement must go on to expose the extreme hypocrisy of the administration's putatively moral justification for its war against Iraq. It can accomplish this by bringing out the sharp contrast between the Government's ostensible concern with aggression and human rights in the case of Kuwait and the reality of its own past practice and that of its allies—especially toward Iraq itself. This is the way to begin to persuade a broader public of the systematically imperialist character of US foreign policy, and the unconcern of this policy for human rights where their assertion stands in the way of American interests.

### 'The Cost of Closing Our Eyes to Aggression'

That the US intervention has nothing to do with its stated aims of opposing tyranny and expansionism is most obvious from the very recent history of the USA's relationship with Iraq itself. Right up to the day of its invasion of Kuwait, Iraq was a close ally of the United States. When Iraq first invaded Iran, the USA symptomatically failed to denounce its aggression, and simply called for negotiations to settle the outstanding differences between the parties. Somewhat later Ronald Reagan ordered the 'tilt' in the Middle East toward Iraq, and as a result the USA, as well as the other Western powers—along with the Soviet Union—gave Iraq massive material, especially military, aid throughout the 1980s. This aid was proffered despite the repressiveness of Saddam's domestic rule, well-documented in the reports of international human-rights organizations. It was given, what's more, despite the widely accepted fact that during this period the Iraqi regime was carrying out the mass murder of some 45,000 Kurds, a non-Arab national minority within its territory. Indeed, the US administration opposed the effort to pass an international resolution condemning Iraq for deploying chemical weapons against the Kurds, as well as against its external enemies. At the same time, the US State Department made sure to have Iraq removed from its list of 'terrorist nations'.

The reason for this support for Iraq is obvious, and directly undercuts the argument that the USA is today fighting Iraq because it has carried out an unjust invasion. The United States backed Iraq precisely to support its unprovoked invasion of, and war against, the USA's (then) hated enemy, Iran. The Iran-Iraq war dragged on for eight years, ending only in 1988. It involved Iraq's extensive use of poison gas and vicious attacks against civilians. In total, the war brought over one million Iranian and Iraqi deaths. In its later stages the US Navy directly intervened in support of Iraq in the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, US experts, while supplying Iraq with satellite intelligence photographs of Iran, were directly working with Saddam to implement the military strategy that allowed Iraq to stave off defeat in the war's final stages. In addition, the US government went to great lengths to help Iraq secure private credit, notably by guaranteeing a loan of some \$3 billion from the Banca Nazionale de Lavoro in Atlanta. Right up to the night of 2 August, US arms dealers were sending the most modern and lethal weaponry to Saddam, sanctioned and encouraged to do so by the US government.



The idea that the United States is worried about invasions, or stands in any vaguely principled way against authoritarian regimes and for human rights, or for the right of nations to self-determination, is a cruel joke, belied by the unending succession of direct armed interventions by the USA since World War II—in Greece, Korea, Guatemala, Iran, Lebanon, Cuba, Santo Domingo, Vietnam, Southern Africa, Grenada, Panama and so on. There is no point in discussing the recent history of US intervention in Central America; US support for death-squad regimes, which over the decade have killed some 50,000 in El Salvador, and perhaps 150,000 in Guatemala, as well as its 'low intensity' Contra war against Nicaragua, is all too notorious. Still, it may help further to place the war against Iraq in its proper context to point out that at virtually the same moment, in the middle of January, that the US government began its bombing of Baghdad in the name of freedom, it was releasing millions of dollars in aid to the effectively fascist Arena government in El Salvador. Nor is there reason to discuss at any length the outlaw invasion of Panama, which produced several thousand civilian casualties, or the mining of Managua harbour in Nicaragua—both condemned by the World Court. It may, however, be a useful exercise to note briefly in passing that the UN General Assembly condemned the invasion of Panama as unlawful, and to imagine what the US reaction would have been had it been bombed by some third nation seeking to enforce the UN resolution.

In his State of the Union address, George Bush had the audacity to state that 'the cost of closing our eyes to aggression is beyond mankind's power to imagine'. Unfortunately the United States has for years been closing its eyes not only to its own ghastly invasions and atrocities, but to those of its allies; and the costs are there for all to see. We might briefly consider here some prominent instances.

East Timor secured its independence from the Portuguese in the summer of 1975, but was given little time to enjoy it. After a brief but violent conflict among Timorese political groupings fighting for control, FRETILIN secured a victory and governed the country until 7 December. On that day, Indonesia—one of the USA's staunchest allies—launched an invasion of East Timor, obviously having received a go-ahead from the United States, for Gerald Ford and Henry Kissinger had departed the country only a few hours before the invasion started. The Indonesian regime had initially endeared itself to the United States in 1965 when, on coming to power in a bloody coup, it had killed between 500,000 and 1,000,000 of its leftist opponents. In the course of taking over East Timor in the following years, the Indonesians slaughtered between 100,000 and 200,000 people, one sixth to one third of the population—a clear case of genocide. However, the United States has not only shielded Indonesia from attack whenever the East Timor question has been raised in the UN, but it has continued to make Indonesia a major beneficiary of US aid.

Analogously, Turkey—the USA's leading ally in the Balkans—seized Northern Cyprus in the mid 1970s. In the course of so doing, it expelled some 200,000 Greek Cypriots, jailed thousands of others, and seized Greek property and shipped it back to Turkey. For this,

Turkey has been condemned in UN resolutions as harsh as those condemning the takeover of Kuwait. But the reaction of the United States has been rather more understanding than in the case of Iraq, granting Turkey an annual subsidy of \$500,000,000 in foreign aid.

Morocco's invasion and annexation of the Western Sahara constitutes still another case of a relatively recent US complicity in an invasion by one of its allies. As also is the South African occupation and invasion of Namibia, which provoked several UN resolutions but won effective US approval. It could not be more obvious that it is routine US practice to 'close its eyes' to aggression, so long as such action is carried out with the USA's permission, by friends of the USA, in ways compatible with US interests.

### Israel, Syria, and the War against Iraq

Perhaps most cynical of all is the US government's sanction of aggression and the suppression of human rights directly pursuant to its attack upon Iraq. Above all, and in the face of successive highly critical United Nations resolutions, the USA persists in defending continued Israeli control of the occupied territories—secured through Israel's ruthless repression of the Palestinians' struggle for self-determination, the Intifada.

In the recent period, one has witnessed, close-up on television, the tragedy of the deaths of several Israeli civilians as a result of Iraq's missile attacks. But the fact is that other tragedies have not received any such coverage in the media. Over the course of the three years of the Intifada, between Winter 1987 and Winter 1990, some 890 Palestinians have been killed, and fewer than 30 Israelis. A further 12,000 Palestinians are in administrative detention. In Spring 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon, supposedly in response to attacks by Palestinians just over the border, but in reality in response to a situation in which the Palestinians' observation of a ceasefire for an extended period had put Israel under increasing pressure to negotiate a settlement. In any case, far from confining themselves to securing Israel's frontiers—the ostensible reason for the invasion—Israel bombarded Beirut, killing some 20,000 civilians in the process, and did nothing to prevent the massacres of many hundreds of Palestinians in refugee camps at Sabra and Shatila. Israel today still controls a substantial part of Lebanon.

Not only has US support for Israel continued undiminished despite its aggressions and repressions; it could hardly be clearer that the defence of the Israeli positions vis-à-vis the Palestinians is a central objective of the USA's Gulf policy itself. As recently as early January *Newsday* reported that Iraq was willing to withdraw from Kuwait in exchange for a US promise not to attack; the withdrawal of foreign troops from the region; and moves toward a solution to the Palestinian problem. It is obvious that, had he so wished, Bush could have interpreted such a settlement—requiring no more than an international conference that would consider (not necessarily resolve) the Israeli-Palestinian question among other Middle East conflicts—as the unqualified victory he demanded. That he did not do so is indicative of the lengths

to which the US government will go to prevent even the possibility of a weakening of the Israeli position.

So two-faced is the administration in carrying out its ostensible war against tyranny and aggression that even as it made preparations for the invasion of Iraq it gave the green light to its new-found ally, Syria, to carry out an invasion across its border into Lebanon. The Syrian regime is, in form and content, very much like that of Iraq: it is led by Hafez al-Assad, a dictator in the mould of Saddam Hussein and self-defined as an expression of the Ba'ath movement and Ba'ath ideology. In 1982, Assad's regime was responsible for a massacre of its own, killing between 20,000 and 30,000 of its citizens in a town called Hama. The US press has barely noticed that, as the price of Syria's alliance, the USA has essentially agreed to allow Syria to consolidate its already substantial control over Lebanon during the autumn and early winter. The result is that today Lebanon is, in effect, under Syrian occupation, with all non-Syrian forces being excluded from any part in running the country.

Finally, it cannot be emphasized enough that the USA gave Iraq reason to believe that it would not oppose some sort of Iraqi incursion into Kuwait. On 25 July 1990, just eight days before the invasion, at a time when Iraq was wrangling with Kuwait over Iraq's debt, over Kuwait's insistence on undercutting OPEC oil prices, and over disputed territory on the Iraq-Kuwait border, the US Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, told Saddam Hussein, in direct conversation, the following: 'President Bush wants better and deeper relations with Iraq. And he also wants an Iraqi contribution to peace and prosperity in the Middle East... He is not going to declare an economic war against Iraq... We have many Americans who would, like you, like to see the price of oil go over \$25 per barrel, because they come from oil producing states... I've lived here for years and I admire your extraordinary efforts to rebuild your country. I know you need funds. We understand that. And our opinion is that you should have the opportunity to rebuild your country. *We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait*' (emphasis added). Six days later, Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly was asked in a House subcommittee hearing by Representative Lee Hamilton, 'If Iraq... charged across the border into Kuwait—for whatever reason—what would be our position with regard to US forces?' Kelly responded that this was a hypothetical question. Hamilton replied 'Is it correct to say, however, that we do not have a treaty commitment which would obligate us to engage US forces?' To which Kelly responded, 'That is correct.' These are hardly the statements of a government resolved to discourage an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

The point is that Iraq only recently had powerfully served US interests in its war against Iran. Iraq was therefore explicitly demanding that Kuwait cease to undercut Iraq's attempts to keep oil prices up in order that it could secure the revenue to rebuild. It was also implicitly demanding that it be allowed to cancel its debts to, and maybe take some further compensation from, Kuwait. Clearly the USA was not unsympathetic; in fact, it does not seem unlikely that the USA was

prepared to overlook some sort of limited Iraqi annexation of Kuwait, possibly the takeover of the Rumaila oil fields.

Obviously Saddam Hussein went too far in going all the way to Kuwait City. There is an illuminating analogy here with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. At that time, the United States apparently gave its approval for something like a twenty-mile Israeli incursion, but Israel went on to bombard Beirut mercilessly. The main difference of course was the outcome of each of these violations: Israel received some \$3 billion in aid as punishment; Iraq is experiencing the greatest air bombardment in world history. The question remains, why?

### Economic and Geopolitical Interests

It is fairly easy to specify the imperial goals—economic and political—that the USA wants to achieve through its current policy in the Gulf. However, what ultimately makes that policy difficult to understand is that the means the United States is pursuing to secure its goals are either unnecessary for their achievement or are destined to have the effect of preventing their realization, or will likely involve costs far out of proportion to the benefits to be derived. One is therefore forced to the conclusion that while these goals form the necessary background to an explanation of US military intervention in the Gulf, there is actually more here—or perhaps less—than meets the eye.

Oil is obviously, in a general way, the key issue. Because of oil the Middle East constitutes the region perhaps most pivotal for US policy. If what was at stake was an unfriendly invasion in Sub-Saharan Africa, the response would likely be very different. A central goal of US, and Western, policy in the region has been to keep oil in the hands of states of a very particular sort, and out of the hands of other sorts of states. A major part of the Middle East oil is under the control of dictatorial rulers who are the direct clients and creations of the West, and who rule over sparsely populated nations that can in no way constitute a real alternative source of political power in the region. This is no accident and is, of course, the way the USA and the Western powers like it, for it means that the region's oil will flow smoothly and will, to a large extent, be kept from nationalist regimes with the potential to 'destabilize' the area (perhaps by threatening to use the wealth of the region to the benefit of the people who live there). Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are creatures of imperialism and of the oil companies ARAMCO and BP respectively. They are, in every sense, puppet states and, because of their sparse populations, can hardly become much more. They have the additional advantage—precisely because they represent little more than extended families closely attached to the West—of having little desire to spend too much of their money in developing their domestic economies, and are therefore quite pleased to place their gigantic incomes in Western banks or businesses, vastly improving the liquidity of the capitalist economy. This is especially advantageous today, with the world's financial system stretched to breaking point. In contrast, Iraq and Iran are large, densely populated nations, which—especially with the help of oil—can develop their economies

and, on that basis, constitute states with the capacity to upset the tranquility of the region. There can be no doubt that US policy in the region, especially since the time of the Iranian revolution, has been about controlling both Iraq and Iran. Since this remains a priority, it helps explain US discomfiture with Saddam's invasion and the desire to stop him.

Nevertheless, to say that the United States and the West would prefer the status quo in the Middle East—and especially the status quo ante, the Iranian revolution—does not amount to demonstrating that the Iraqi invasion constituted a really serious threat to US and Western oil interests. It is obvious that the USA, and the West more generally, would not countenance a hostile state monopolizing the region's oil. For such a monopoly would constitute a powerful political weapon. The fact is, though, that there is no evidence that Iraq planned to take over Saudi Arabia; in any case, once the US troops were sent there any putative threat to the region's oil supply from Iraq was dissolved.

So long as no nation monopolizes Middle East oil, it does not much matter to oil consumers whether the oil of Kuwait is in Iraqi or Kuwaiti hands. Whoever owns the oil must sell it at the world-market price. OPEC can of course try to set prices, but can do so only within strict limits or for the very short term. Attempts to set prices above a certain level simply provoke the opening up of wells that had hitherto operated at too high a cost, thereby raising supply and forcing down the price level. It meant a great deal to Iraq as a seller of oil to be able to have the price set at \$25 per barrel, as opposed to the \$20 per barrel at which Kuwait was selling it. But the difference at the pump amounted to only five cents. One can discern how serious was the threat of an Iraqi takeover of Kuwait for the world oil supply by noting the reaction of the Germans and, especially, the Japanese, who, unlike the USA, do very much depend on Middle East oil. While the USA receives only 12 per cent of its oil from the Middle East, Japan gets 60 per cent, and the Germans get 35 per cent, of their oil from there. Yet, neither the Germans nor the Japanese have expressed an inordinate amount of concern about the Iraqi invasion. It is hard to understand how the threat to oil posed by Iraq's takeover of Kuwait could, in itself, go very far to explain the virulence of the US response.

What about geopolitics in the Middle East? There is no doubt that the United States places a very high priority on international stability within the Middle East, and sees Saddam's Iraq as a serious threat to that stability. But it is very hard to believe that Bush and the US State Department went to war because they thought that they could, in this way, pacify the region. For it had been very widely concluded that war against Iraq—especially the defeat of Iraq—would actually lead to the destabilization of the region.

The reason the USA had supported Iraq in recent years was, in large part, to balance the other two major regional powers, Iran and Syria, both of which were fairly hostile to the USA. If Iraq is really crushed, there will be an enormous vacuum of power and a huge shock to the regional balance of power. Syria, as noted, has already benefited by

virtue of its increased power over Lebanon. It is hard to see why Iran would not also vastly improve its power within the region as a consequence of an Iraqi defeat.

Equally to the point, as it becomes ever more clear that the USA's supposed 'surgical strikes' in Iraq are in fact killing large numbers of Iraqi civilians, there is likely to be an enormous upsurge of Arab nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, and anti-American feeling among the masses of the region. There has been profound anti-American sentiment throughout the region, among common people if not their rulers, as a result of the USA's uncritical support of Israel. But now, with the bombing of Baghdad and Basra, there have already emerged powerful movements committed to overthrow many of the Middle East governments allied with the United States. Mubarak's Egypt, subject of a long campaign by the USA to bring it fully back into the Western orbit, is perhaps the pivotal Arab regime most vulnerable to overthrow in the wake of the USA-Iraq war. Islamic populations beyond the Middle East—in Pakistan, Morocco, and elsewhere—have already expressed their outrage at the American bombing, and the political repercussions are likely to be very great. Thus rather than bringing 'security' to the region, the war is, in short, likely to have seriously destabilizing consequences.

#### 'The New World Order'

With the sudden end of the Cold War, the United States undoubtedly saw a golden opportunity to make a massive show of force so as to enhance the potential for political stability on a world scale. No doubt, too, the target was the Third World: both nationalist regimes that sought to act without the approval of the United States, and domestic revolutionary movements. The expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait was therefore sought for its discouraging impact on potential disturbers of the peace, external or internal. Nevertheless, although one attractive aspect, in the eyes of the administration, of an attack on Iraq was obviously its demonstration effect, it is hard to believe that the war was actually conceived for that purpose. It is not easy to think of many extant nationalist regimes with the desire or potential to defy the USA. Indeed, it is doubtful if Iraq itself would have acted as it did, had it known that the USA was likely to disapprove. At the same time, there can be little doubt that proponents of revolution by armed struggle, dependent on territorial bases in the countryside, have been more than satisfactorily discouraged by the terrible toll taken by US interventions in Central America and beyond over the past decade. A war against Iraq was hardly necessary to deter them further. On the other hand, it is far from clear that mass urban-based revolutions—either of secular social or religious sort—could in any simple or direct way be short-circuited by the threat of external intervention. To put the same point another way: with the total collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States had probably achieved as close to a Pax Americana, conceived in purely military terms, as was feasible. The additional costs of a full-scale war could only secure marginal gains toward this goal.

One caveat must be made here. Had Bush been certain he could win

the war quickly, and entirely by means of air power, he might reasonably have concluded that that price was low enough to be worth the outcome. This possibility cannot be entirely ruled out. Still, in view of the fact that Bush certainly had heard from many advisers, including the CIA, the State Department, and his military chief of staff, that a ground war was difficult or impossible to avoid, it is hard to see how he could have *counted* on avoiding the costs of such a conflict. But if a ground war does develop, there is a real likelihood, as many commentators have warned, that the major cost in American lives will precipitate powerful political opposition at home, and that the cost in dollars will very much exacerbate an already serious recession. In this light, the Iraq war as a means to deter potential disturbers of the 'new world order' seems an incomprehensibly risky proposition for the American government.

It is possible to state an initial conclusion: the USA has major economic, regional geopolitical and world-imperial interests in stopping Saddam Hussein. However, two questions remain unanswered: first, how will the war secure these interests, rather than actually preventing their achievement? and second, in what way can the goals that it may be feasible to achieve possibly be considered worth the likely cost of their realization? That these questions are far from academic is obvious from the fact that the USA's allies among the advanced capitalist states, with the exception only of Britain and France, have assessed the threat posed to their fundamental economic and political interests by the Iraqi invasion very differently from the way the USA has. Indeed, they have viewed the war as unnecessary at best and counterproductive at worst. Except for England and France they are sending only token troop contingents—ranging in size from the 1,800 (0.26 per cent of the total) sent by Canada, to the 300 (0.04 per cent of the total) sent by Denmark—and offering little financially. Most indicatively, both Japan and Germany are notably unenthusiastic about, if not actually disapproving of, the US policy, and have needed to have their arms twisted to give even the meagre support so far proffered. At this juncture, the United States has squeezed around \$12 billion out of the Japanese and \$9 billion from the Germans, but these are unremarkable sums, not of an order of magnitude very different from that of the \$6.4 billion recently paid by the Japanese corporate giant Matsushita for MCA, a leading US entertainment company. There has rarely been a war with such purely imperialist roots; but, like other imperialist wars, this one appears almost certain to bring counterproductive consequences for capitalist interests, most notably those of the USA. It is this likelihood—because it appeared so evident so early to so many, notably among the leading allied capitalist powers—that makes explanations of the war more difficult than might at first appear.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the United States went to war with Iraq because it placed such a high value on projecting US power/force on a world scale in the aftermath of the Cold War that mundane cost calculations seemed beside the point. The key to the emergence of this rather puzzling perspective was the extremely paradoxical position in which the USA found itself, internationally and

domestically, in the summer of 1990. At that point, the United States had, in purely military-political terms, reached a position of power on an international scale perhaps greater than it had enjoyed at any time since the end of World War II. On the other hand, its economic position, ultimately based on manufacturing competitiveness, was in profound relative decline, with little prospect of reversal. Meanwhile, with the end of the Reagan 'boom', Bush faced an impasse on domestic policy that seemed virtually insoluble and therefore likely to end his presidency in 1992.

### The World's Policeman

By the summer of 1990 the crisis and overturnings in the East, and the Soviet Union's virtual abdication of its former international role, appeared to have opened up almost unlimited horizons for the United States. US policymakers appear to have been overtaken by euphoria, hatching plans for aggressive action to display US power so as to secure a now-perfectable Pax Americana (see Michael Klare's informative article, referenced on p. 123). From this perspective the attack on Iraq makes sense. But, again, the question immediately imposes itself: aggression and power for what?

In the first place, the collapse of Soviet power would appear to have made the projection of military power much less necessary. It is debatable, of course, whether the USSR ever posed a serious military threat to the United States. Moreover, it had obviously been seeking, for quite a few years, some sort of secure *modus vivendi* (for which it was willing to pay a very high price in terms of honouring the US sphere of influence in particular, and recognizing US imperial interests in general). It is true that Soviet aid had been very helpful to certain Third World revolutions—most recently in Central America—but such aid was clearly in the process of dwindling to nothing. In any case, even if US policy makers had believed their own propaganda—specifically, that the 'Communist threat' was, in one way or another, behind every threat to international capitalist stability—they should have begun to breathe easy by the summer of 1990.

There can be no doubt, of course, that, apart from the need to counter a largely chimerical 'Communist threat', the need to protect capitalist property and stability—above all, in the Third World—remains a fundamental military-political problem for the capitalist states. This problem is especially pressing today, in view of the highly uneven and unstable process of industrialization taking place in important regions of what is still called the 'Third World', in countries like Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, Mexico, and so forth. In these regions an often militant working class is emerging to challenge the authoritarian regimes that seek to ensure a low-waged, repressed and unorganized labour force so as to attract capitalist investment. It is also true that the advanced capitalist states have reason to retain a potential to control inter-national conflict in the Third World, if and when such conflict seriously threatens their interests. There remains, then, a clear need for a world policeman; but the problem immediately arises as to why anyone today would want to assume this role.



In a bygone era of classical imperialism, military power could, at least in many cases, be directly translatable into material advantage. It might secure colonies and land, exclusive control of valuable raw materials, monopolies of export markets, privileged access to financial opportunities, and so forth. There was, in other words, a way in which military power and military action constituted a valuable tool for the redistribution of the world's wealth; the ability to redistribute wealth might, moreover, be just as valuable as—or able to compensate for—the ability to produce and sell on the market. But it is difficult to see that situation as one that persists today to any great extent. What wars have recently paid dividends in these ways? For this reason the role of world cop is pretty much a *faux frais* of capitalism, as well as individual capitalists, and a very expensive one at that. In consequence, one might expect the disagreement over who is to bear the cost and responsibility for the role of world policeman to be a major source of conflict among the advanced capitalist states. There has, in fact, been some evidence of this. But the overwhelming trend, as all can see, has been for the United States enthusiastically and obsessively to assume the role. As George Bush himself modestly put it to *Time* magazine: 'I would not call the United States the world's policeman, because there are certain areas where we wouldn't be in a position to act or want to act. But we have a disproportionate responsibility for the freedom and the security of various countries.' The question remains, why?

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that those in charge of the American state see the build-up and assertion of military strength as the only way of maintaining the appearance of American power and hegemony. But, in the light of what I have just argued, this is a paradoxical goal. If you can't gain much directly from military might, and it imposes such a tremendous drain on your resources, why do you want it so much? The resolution of the paradox, from the standpoint of the American state, would seem to be that there is simply no alternative. This is not the place for a systematic discussion of US economic decline; but the fact is that across the manufacturing economy—from high technology, to mainstream manufacturing, to low-skill/cheap wage production—US-based producers are losing out to Japan, to Germany, to some extent to other European producers, and to the East Asian economies. At the same time, as part and parcel of this trend, the most powerful sections of US capital, based in finance and multinational corporations, are pursuing their interests on a world scale and have, to an important degree, unhinged their fate from that of US-based manufacturing. This is not the result of whim, but reflects the fact that, generally speaking—for a variety of economic, institutional, social and political reasons—the best opportunities for profitable investment no longer lie within the United States. It is far from evident that even an enormous state commitment could reverse this situation; moreover, it appears quite obvious that sufficient political pressure to secure such a commitment will not be forthcoming, precisely (in part) because strong support for it is lacking among the leading US banks and manufacturing corporations. In this context, it is not surprising that little interest exists within the political establishment for seeking to restrengthen US power through restrengthening

the underlying economy. The American state is thus obsessed with directly building up and projecting military-political power, because power, and its expression, is available to it in no other manner or form. The US state builds its military strength, in a way, to compensate for its loss of economic power—and because it cannot rebuild this power—even though so doing will undoubtedly contribute to further relative economic decline and, in the end, political-military disintegration. Here it is useful to make the comparison with Japan, which represents precisely the opposite configuration of economic and military power to that of the United States. In contrast with the USA, Japanese state power is inexorably increasing because the underlying strength of its economy is inexorably increasing. Moreover, Japan can avoid what might, in other circumstances, be its share of the unproductive costs of maintaining capitalism's international police force—with the consequent harm to its economy—precisely because so far the USA has been so willing to assume that burden, with the consequent losses to its economy.

Bush's attack on Iraq thus appears to be designed to establish, and make clear to all, that the United States remains the world's hegemon. Because that is valued for its own sake, mere considerations of cost, human and economic, have been thrown out of the window to the detriment of US power in the long term, and to the detriment of the people of the Middle East, and the United States, in the short term.

### The Political Impasse at Home

Although in the summer of 1990 the Bush government appeared to face a limitless vista of freedom of action abroad, it confronted the most profound, and politically depressing, constraints at home. Not only was the S&L scandal discrediting the political establishment, but, more to the point, the economic crisis of the S&L banks was showing itself to be only the tip of the iceberg: a profound financial crisis was extending itself virtually across the entire economy. Commercial banks, real-estate companies, investment houses, consumers, state and local governments all faced record indebtedness at a point when returns on investment—especially in such mainstay sectors as real estate—were falling precipitately. What made this indebtedness so frightening was that the long Reagan boom had obviously come to an end, and a new recession, which promised to be as bad as that of 1979–82 if not much worse, had already begun to envelop the economy, with many states already fiercely gripped by depression.

At this point, to head off a crash, Bush was compelled to take the politically disastrous step of going back on his pivotal campaign promise not to raise taxes. This was the only way to prevent a rising budget deficit from pushing interest rates through the ceiling and precipitating a crash. However, this action brought about a sharp division in the Republican Party and a momentary reprieve for the Democrats. Bush's popularity ratings had soon fallen to their lowest point since his election. More to the point, there was no prospect for improvement. As the recession deepened, as it inevitably would, the deficits would become even worse, and Bush would be forced, for the

foreseeable future, to impose policies of further cuts in services—including such politically sensitive ones as reductions in Medicare—and increases in taxes. The political effects were likely to be even more catastrophic for the administration than usual because almost every state and city government was itself facing bankruptcy and in the midst of harsh austerity drives, leading to substantial lay-offs. For as far in the future as the eye could see, the Bush administration faced the prospect of declining political viability.

In this situation Iraq's rather reckless invasion of Kuwait appeared as a godsend to the Bush administration—a chance to kill several birds with one stone. The administration could, first of all, organize the massive show of US power that policymakers were already itching to stage. By this means, Bush could also distract attention from the domestic political impasse and absorb the citizenry in a patriotic crusade, justified in the name of the defence of democracy and opposition to aggression. The result would be a tremendous victory, internationally and domestically, that would not only assure triumph in the next election, but also a world-shaking celebration of US might. Best of all, there appeared the opportunity of securing these goals very cheaply, for it was undoubtedly assumed that Iraq would not wish to risk war, and would meekly and quickly evacuate.

What is most revealing about the run-up to the war is that, while Bush undoubtedly hoped to dislodge Iraq from Kuwait without resort to force, he was—essentially from the start—quite set on going to war in order to impose a total US victory, were that to be necessary. The USA's insistence not merely on Iraqi withdrawal but on unconditional Iraqi surrender makes shockingly clear the obsession of the administration to have its show of American power, no matter what the cost. As soon became evident, the Bush administration had absolutely no interest in negotiations or sanctions. To negotiate would have been to forego the opportunity of imposing the humiliating defeat that was required to display America's strength and will; for negotiations would obviously have required at least a certain recognition of Saddam Hussein and the consideration of some sort of compromise, however one-sided, for securing Iraq's withdrawal. As *Fortune* (11 February 1991, p. 46) so accurately and ingenuously explained: 'The President and his men worked overtime to quash freelance peacemakers in the Arab world, France, and the Soviet Union who threatened to give Saddam a face-saving way out of the box Bush was building. Over and over, Bush repeated the mantra: no negotiations, no deals, no face-saving, no reward, and specifically no linkage to a Palestine peace conference.'

As to sanctions, we now know that these were, virtually from the start, merely a tactic of the administration, designed to provide a cover and (thin) justification for the military build-up. The administration could not rely on sanctions because, were these to work, they would eventuate in those messy negotiations and compromise the administration most hoped to avoid. By mid October Bush's Chief of Staff, Colin Powell, had requested and been granted the doubling of US troops in the Gulf, from around 225,000 to 450,000 (this was formally

announced immediately after the November election). Since it would have been prohibitively expensive to maintain this number of troops for the time required for sanctions to be effective, it is obvious that Bush decided to depend solely on the military option—scaring Iraq from Kuwait or dislodging it through actual combat—fewer than three months into the crisis, at the very latest.

It was expressive of its whole approach that the administration chose to begin bombing almost immediately after the 15 January deadline, despite—and obviously to cut off—last minute peace proposals from France and elsewhere. Above all, as the administration itself has admitted, Bush moved quickly to avoid what his government has termed 'the nightmare scenario'—the start of an Iraqi troop withdrawal just after the deadline. Such a move might very well have forced the opening of negotiations... and, while securing Kuwait, deprived the USA of unconditional victory through unbridled power.

### Building the Peace Movement

The USA's criminal war against Iraq may present the peace movement, and the Left, with the chance of fundamentally altering the US political landscape. The political potential that actually emerges will depend on the length and cost of the war, about which predictions are pointless. The peace movement and the Left must, in any event, politically take advantage of whatever opportunity arises, by taking account of the transformation in the political landscape since the time of the movement against the Vietnam War.

The movement against the Vietnam War was certainly a powerful mass movement, but its active social base was largely confined to the Black community and the middle class, broadly conceived. There is no doubt that the movement did alter, for a time, American political culture; it did, moreover, touch in many ways the broadest layers of the population. The fact remains that it did not succeed in reaching out to *involve politically* any significant sections of the mainstream working class. There is reason to believe that the new peace movement and the Left can overcome this weakness, and that must be its main priority.

Most significantly, anti-Communism has today ceased to provide an ideological basis for American foreign policy, as it did at the time of Vietnam. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this development. For however thin and implausible a cover for US imperial adventures, anti-Communism provided an indispensable interpretation and moral view of the world which carried weight. Never mind that US interventions were about keeping the world safe for capitalist private property and profitable investment, *whatever* the actual source of the political threat against it. The anti-Communist crusade touched sufficient points in the real world of actually existing Communism—if not in the real world of actually existing US imperialism—to enable the ideology to carry conviction with ordinary citizens. But anti-Communism is obviously no longer viable, and the Bush administration's attempt to justify the war on an explicitly 'moral' basis is not

only bound to backfire because of its patent incongruity with the past and present of American foreign and domestic policy, but is likely to appear increasingly revolting as the body bags mount. It could not be more obvious to American working people that it is their sons and daughters who will, for the most part, pay with their lives for Bush's war. But if the war drags on, and fatalities rise, the question they will increasingly be asking is, 'for what?'

Secondly, the Vietnam War took place, for the most part, at the height of the longest period of prosperity in US history. It was not, it is true, entirely possible for the political establishment to offer both guns and butter. The fact remains that, for most working people, the boom did not end until after the war finished; and that even through the first Nixon administration, social reform—including significant increases in social security, the institution of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and the like—proceeded apace. Things are very different today. The great majority of American working people have suffered declining living and working standards for close to two decades now. They have long given up hope in any gains by reform through the state, and have sought to defend themselves, somewhat cynically, through preventing tax increases—largely at the expense of the poor, in the main people of colour. Today, as the recession deepens and unemployment accelerates, previously protected white-collar layers are, for the first time, being hard-hit, and state-sector workers are being struck by the government's austerity measures. With record losses in mainstream manufacturing lines such as automobiles, few will feel confident of remaining unscathed. In this situation, the astronomical price of a senseless war—estimated to cost one half to a billion dollars a day—is likely to appear progressively less supportable, and an important basis for mobilizing anti-war sentiment.

The extraordinarily large demonstrations on the weekends of 19 and 26 January, in the Bay Area and in Washington, which together involved some 300,000 people or more, show that the peace movement is today far ahead of its anti-Vietnam predecessor at a comparable juncture. Its task is clear: to reach out beyond its largely student and middle-class base. In late December, polls showed that close to half of the American people were against the war. As is well known, with the coming of the war the great majority fell, for the moment, into line behind the President and 'our boys', with some 75 per cent supporting Bush. What has been less noticed, however, is that in the 6 January *Washington Post/ABC News* poll, in which 63 per cent backed the use of force after 15 January, only 43 per cent said they would support a war in which a thousand Americans died, and only 35 per cent would support a war in which ten thousand died. The American people have no interest in, or ethical commitment to, this war. If the peace movement and the Left can rid themselves once and for all of their lingering elitism—the belief that ordinary people are incapable of discovering and acting in their own interest—and their residual Third Worldism—the underlying conviction that working people have been corrupted by the crumbs of imperialism—we may have a chance to build a broadly based opposition to President Bush's obscene adventure.

## Liberal Militarism and the British State

The British contribution to the Gulf war, the Cold War rhetoric of Margaret Thatcher, and the fresh memory of the Falklands war remind us of the military propensities of the British state.\* Yet Britain has not had conscription since the fifties, its generals keep out of political life, and its armed forces have been held to suffer from amateurism and neglect. Memories of the inter-war period still inform contemporary perceptions, and the spirit of appeasement is frequently perceived to be a live danger. In this article I will question conventional pictures of the British state and its military policies shared by Right and Left alike. I will show that the war-fighting sector of the state has been well funded and deeply suffused with the scientific, technological and industrial spirit. There was a good reason for this: the 'British way in warfare', which I label 'liberal militarism', has relied on technology; and creating this technology required a technically expert state machine. I will argue, furthermore, that Britain's war-fighting strategy is 'modern': Britain's weapons have been directed not only at the armed forces of enemy nations,

but also at their civil populations and industry. Britain is not so much a 'caricature of an exterminist formation',<sup>1</sup> rather it has pioneered a distinctively modern militarism.

Why Britain pursued such a policy is easily explained: Britain was, after all, the first industrial nation, and the first scientific nation; the two distinctive elements in nineteenth-century culture were political economy and natural science. Just as important was the fact that from the end of the nineteenth century Britain was challenged, industrially, commercially and militarily, by nations which were, actually or potentially, absolutely larger and thus more powerful in each of these three spheres. To defend itself, and to maintain control over its markets, trade routes and empire, Britain developed military and diplomatic alliances—with France and Russia before 1914; through the League of Nations in the interwar years; and above all through NATO since 1945. But Britain also had to rely on its comparative advantage in war-fighting technology to sustain this. Why Britain's policy of high-tech militarism is neglected in the vast literature on the British state and its industrial and scientific policies is not so easily explained.

### The Military and British Decline

Both the military and war do figure in accounts of the British state. Perry Anderson, for example, has tried to integrate British defence policy into his explanation of British decline. He notes three 'absences' in the Victorian state, one of which was the lack of a mass army. The War Office and Admiralty,<sup>2</sup> he argued, were not 'the controlling centre of the state structure as a whole'. This role was played by the *laissez faire* Treasury.<sup>3</sup> Because the British State was not defeated in war or revolution, it retained its Victorian character: the British state 'constructed to contain social conflict at home and police an empire abroad, has proved impotent to redress economic decline. The night-watchman state acquired traits of the welfare officer, but never of the engineer. Sustained and structural intervention in the economy was the one task for which its organic liberalism was entirely ill-suited.'<sup>4</sup> Anderson drew much of his evidence from Correlli Barnett's influential account of British scientific, technical and industrial performance in the Second World War, which is probably the most interconnected analysis of war, state and economy ever attempted for Britain.<sup>5</sup> Barnett argued that the British war economy, contrary to the prevailing view, performed very badly: even in its greatest emergency the state failed to modernize itself. Instead it launched an expensive programme

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<sup>1</sup> E P Thompson, 'Notes on Exterminism, the Last Stage of Civilization', in *New Left Review*, eds., *Exterminism and Cold War*, London 1982, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> This was the already archaic British nomenclature for the Army Ministry and Navy Ministry respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Perry Anderson, 'The Figures of Descent', *NLR* 161, January–February 1987, pp. 27–8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War. The Illusions and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation*, London 1986.

of welfare reform which would dominate the postwar state and post-war economy, with disastrous consequences.

The traditional view of the effect of war, and especially of the Second World War, on the British state and its relationship to the economy is rather different and very important to Britain's self-image. It is that the British state transformed itself, and as a result the British war economy was uniquely successful. Of course there are many pictures of why the wartime state was successful: we have only to think of the Right's adulation of Churchillian militarism and of Harold Wilson's invocation of the Dunkirk Spirit.<sup>6</sup> For socialists the war showed that democratic planning was possible, despite Oskar Lange's damning comparison between state socialist planning and capitalist war economies. For Michael Barratt Brown, for example, the wartime discontinuity is important as a key example of the possibilities that existed and exist for the transformation of the state, and to argue against Anderson's explanation of why the state is as it is.<sup>7</sup> But it is important to note that the contrast with the Anderson/Barnett view of the British state is not as great as first appears: there is little disagreement over the nature of the British state in peacetime.

I will suggest that both these views are misleading, and show that 'liberal militarism' represents an important but neglected continuity in the history of the British state. The successes, and failures, of wartime armaments production are due not just to the peculiar circumstances of wartime, but also to the long-term policies of the state for the development of military technology. I will argue that the military sector needs to be distinguished from the civil sector in both war and peace, and that in the military sector there has been no indifference to science, technology or industry. The state machinery for armament supply has had, from the Victorian era, traits of the engineer. I am not arguing that the Admiralty, the War Office and the later service and supply departments controlled the state. Instead I suggest that the central bodies of the state, including the Treasury, have pursued a policy of 'liberal militarism' which required the creation of 'technocratic' departments of state. I do not deny that important changes were made to these departments during the two world wars, or that war required the incorporation of labour and the mobilization of the whole nation. Yet I do argue that these changes resulted not from a failure of these

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<sup>6</sup> See Anthony Barnett, 'Iron Britannia', *NLR* 134, July–August 1982. In what follows I will argue, in effect, that 'Churchillianism', while certainly involving reaction abroad and social reform at home, also involved the maintenance of dirigiste state machinery for arms supply.

<sup>7</sup> In his account of the 'Real Crisis in British Society', Barratt Brown argues that: 'The gap that opened in British society with such disastrous results was . . . between, on the one hand, the practice of practical men in industry, technology and in banking and commerce, and on the other hand the philosophy of the academics in education, science and government . . . The growing gap between government and industry was no less serious. Industrial organization, let alone reorganization, lay far outside the studies or experience of recruits to the Civil Service. Industrialists had to be brought in during two world wars to manage these things and were soon expelled thereafter along with the controls they alone knew how to operate. Technical and scientific officers were either given a secondary role or set to general tasks where their intellectual resources were wasted.' Michael Barratt Brown, 'Away With All the Great Arches: Anderson's History of British Capitalism', *NLR* 167, January–February 1988, pp. 41–2.



departments to be modern and 'technocratic' in peacetime, but rather that the particular 'technocratic' programme they followed proved inadequate to the wars actually being fought. In the postwar period both Labour and Conservative governments have pursued an expensive strategy of keeping Britain's military industries at the leading edge.

### Technology and the 'British Way in Warfare'

In what follows I sketch a brief and thus oversimplified outline of the main features of British defence policy and its relationship to technology. I will argue that there has been a 'British Way in Warfare' which has relied on technology rather than manpower, and that the United States followed in its wake. Partly for this reason it is appropriate to label this mode of warfare 'liberal militarism'. Four features of 'liberal militarism' need highlighting. Firstly, it does not involve the use of mass conscript armies. Second, it relies on technology and professionals to make up for this deficiency in manpower. Third, 'liberal militarist' armed forces are not only directed at enemy armies but also at their civil populations and economic capacity.<sup>8</sup> Fourth, 'liberal militarism' advances under the banner of its own universalist ideology and conception of a world order, whether Pax Britannica or Pax Americana. British 'liberal militarism' may be divided into four historical phases: three distinguished by the key technology employed—'navalism', 'air forceism', 'nuclearism'—a fourth emergent phase as an active but minor partner in a new American 'Pax Technologica'. Some elements of the above picture are generally acknowledged, but are interpreted in misleading ways. Britain is seen as non-militaristic because it has a small army. 'Navalism' is seen as Imperial and irrelevant to direct competition with the great powers, either economically or militarily.<sup>9</sup> 'Air forceism' is seen as deficient technologically—Correlli Barnett is not alone in this<sup>10</sup>—and it is seen as defensive, as relying on fighter aircraft, and again having too Imperial an orientation.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For some students of militarism 'liberal militarism' is a contradiction in terms. Thus Alfred Vagts argued that militarism does not exist: 'when armies call for and make efficient, rational, up to date and, to a certain extent, human use of the materials and forces available to them; when they prepare themselves for war decided upon, not by themselves, but by the civilian powers of the state; . . . when they get ready for the true future war which is not "in the air", but which takes the form of an image deduced from the general economy of contemporary society and from the materials it produces as war materials.' Quoted in Volker Berghahn, *Militarism. The History of an International Debate 1861-1979*, Cambridge 1984, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, pp. 37, 38, 43. By implication, for Anderson the key service is the army, but the Victorian army was deficient: 'career officers tended to come from the neediest and least reputable branch of the [landlord] class, its Anglo-Irish extension' (p. 32). The Victorian army was certainly deficient in many ways, but its officer corps cannot be characterized as socially, economically or regionally marginal. For example, between 37 per cent and 57 per cent of colonels and generals between 1854 and 1914 came from the south of England alone (Edward Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914*, London 1980, Appendix 2). In any case, by 1914 the British Army was a highly efficient and well-equipped professional force.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson notes that 'Only in the final countdown to hostilities did the British State muster the will to start to reorganize the aircraft industry—its sole interventionist initiative of significance in twenty years' Anderson, p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Peden has convincingly shown that the argument that Empire commitments weakened Britain's European forces in the 1930s is wrong. G.C. Peden, 'The Burden of Imperial Defence and the Continental Commitment Revisited', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 27, 1984, pp. 405-23.

Britain's possession of nuclear weapons is conventionally seen merely as a desperate attempt to remain a Great Power. Finally, British military expeditions, like Suez or the Falklands, are seen as Blimpish hangovers from the days of Empire. Each of these perceptions, however, is misleading.

### *Navalism*

In the nineteenth century the Royal Navy was the central component of Britain's war-fighting capacity. It was Britain's principal defensive and offensive weapon, designed to be used against the great industrial powers. With the rise of the German naval threat in the Edwardian years the Royal Navy was enlarged, modernized and increasingly deployed in the North Sea. Indeed the German naval threat to Britain was quite central to Britain's whole defence policy before 1914, even to the decision to create an Expeditionary Force to fight alongside the French Army. We can make the point concrete by considering British plans for the First World War. The conventional argument is that Britain's maritime orientation, and its *laissez faire* politics, prevented it from developing the capacity to fight a modern war against modern Germany. But, as David French has argued, 'by August 1914 Britain intended to fight the war by blockading Germany and causing its economy to collapse. Simultaneously the Royal Navy would keep open Britain's sea lanes and so the British economy would be able to supply its allies with all the munitions they needed to carry on the land war.'<sup>12</sup> This strategy failed, and Britain had quickly to resort first to a volunteer mass army and then to a conscript mass army.

In the Edwardian years there was certainly opposition to reliance on a high-technology Navy for the defence of the realm. Within the Navy the 'historical school' favoured a return to Nelsonian principles of heroic command, rather than going down the 'materiel school' road of stressing organization and technology and a greater role for engineering officers.<sup>13</sup> These differences within the Navy were reproduced in the debate between the 'navalists' and the 'nation in arms' lobby. Navalists of all types stressed the economic and military efficiency of navalism—there was no need to have a mass army; advocates of the 'nation in arms' objected to the liberal idea of defence as an insurance policy entrusted to subcontracted sailors and machines—what mattered in war was the martial spirit and patriotic unity of the whole nation.<sup>14</sup> Both arguments were very public: the first was encapsulated

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<sup>12</sup> David French, *British Economic and Strategic Planning 1905–1915*, London 1982, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> See Bernard Semmel's outstanding recent book, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy. Ideology, Interest, and Sea Power during the Pax Britannica*, London 1986, and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism*, London 1980, and *Strategy and Diplomacy, 1870–1945*, *Essex Studies*, London 1983.

<sup>14</sup> J. H. Grainger, *Paternalism: Britain 1900–1939*, London 1986, chapter 14, 'The Call to Arms'. There are of course socialist variants of this argument. See B. Semmel, ed., *Marxism and the Science of War*, Oxford 1981. The Vietnam War provides a good example. In a reactionary variant the contrast between technology and the martial spirit is a central theme of Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now*. Indeed a startling expression of the theme is to be found in the inspiration of the film, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. 'Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs

in the battle between Admiral Fisher and Lord Charles Beresford, the second in the campaign for conscription embodied in Lord Roberts's National Service League.

By 1914 the Royal Navy was the largest in the world, as is well known. Less known is the fact that the Royal Navy had the largest submarine force in the world, and the largest naval air service.<sup>14</sup> Nor is it well known that it was the Royal Navy Air Service which pioneered strategic bombing. It ordered heavy bombers from Handley Page in 1914, though these were not delivered until 1916. In the interim it used other aircraft to launch air raids on docks and airship stations in Germany. The Royal Naval Air Service also pioneered the tank: land battleships to defend its air bases—the Admiralty Committee which developed the tank was called the Landship Committee. By 1918 Britain was the largest tank producer in the world.

### *Airforceism*

At the end of the First World War Britain had the largest air force and the largest tank force in the world. If the war had continued into 1919 it is likely that both technologies would have been central to British tactics on the Western Front. However, aircraft had already been developed for another role, the strategic bombing of German cities. Air-power enthusiasts had been calling for such bombing since at least 1916, and in the summer of 1917 German raids on Britain led to a hysterical campaign for retaliation. It was this pressure, combined with intense and damaging rivalry between the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service, which led to the creation of a unified Royal Air Force in early 1918. Within the RAF an Independent Air Force was created, to bomb Berlin.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> (cont.)

glistening. They shouted, sang, their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at. For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straight-forward facts; but the feeling would not last long. Something would turn up to scare it away. Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush. It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a flag, the muzzles of the long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy shining swell swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns, a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech—and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceedings, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight, and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives—he called them enemies!—hidden out of sight somewhere.' Harmondsworth 1973, pp. 19–20.

<sup>15</sup> L. H. Addington, *Patterns of War since the Eighteenth Century*, London 1984, pp. 141, 108.

<sup>16</sup> Malcolm Cooper, *The Birth of Independent Air Power*, London 1986; W.J. Reader, *Architect of Air Power*, London 1968; Barry Powers, *Strategy Without Side Rule*, London 1976. The best study of the RAF in the interwar years is M. Smith, *British Air Strategy between the Wars*, Oxford 1984. See also David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane. An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation* London 1991.

Britain was unique in having a separately organized RAF and Air Ministry, and would remain so until the late 1920s. Related to this was the fact that the RAF was the only air force in the world whose primary mission was strategic bombing. In the 1920s both the Army and the Navy wanted the RAF disbanded, not because they did not believe in air power, but because they wanted air arms under their own control. In its opposition to these takeover bids the RAF stressed its independent strategic role and had every incentive to develop this instead of its army and navy cooperation roles. Two specific factors also helped keep the RAF independent. The first was its relative cheapness as a means of Imperial control in sparsely populated areas, and especially in the newly 'mandated' territories of the Middle East. In Mesopotamia (Iraq), Transjordan and Palestine, the RAF was put in charge to subdue rebellious tribesmen.<sup>77</sup> The second was the expansion of the French air force in the 1920s, which, incredibly, led to a scare and the expansion of the RAF as a European force.

By the late 1920s the RAF was secure in its independence; by the mid 1930s it was destined to become Britain's principal weapon against Germany. It was the bomber, 'the dreadnought of the air', not the fighter, which was the key to aeronautical policy in the 1930s. When Baldwin famously said in 1932 that 'the bomber would always get through', he was not just expressing despair at the vulnerability of Britain; he was repeating the central strategic tenet of the RAF and the British state. As Baldwin made clear in 1935, Britain could not tolerate a larger bomber force than its own within striking distance of Britain. By 1939 the Air Force was the largest-spending of all three services, whereas in the 1920s it had been the lowest. In 1940 Britain was the largest manufacturer of aircraft in the world, producing 50 per cent more airframes and engines than did the Germans.<sup>78</sup>

British strategy for war in Europe in the late 1930s was clear: as in 1914 there would be a small expeditionary force to fight alongside the French; also as in 1914, the Navy would blockade Germany; and most importantly of all, the RAF would destroy German industrial capacity and the will to resist. When war was declared the British Expeditionary Force was sent to France, and the Navy started its blockade, but the RAF was not unleashed on Germany. It is little known that Britain and France responded favourably to an appeal by President Roosevelt in September 1939 to avoid the bombing of civilians.<sup>79</sup> The British

<sup>77</sup> See C. Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, London 1986, pp. 79–113. In Mesopotamia the RAF first took a 'terrorist' line of bombing civilians, but later moved to a strategy called 'air blockade', the destruction of buildings, food, fuel and livestock (pp. 98–9). The RAF had its own armoured car force as well.

<sup>78</sup> Aircraft production for 1940: UK 13,049; USA 12,804, USSR 10,565, Germany 10,247. Aero-engine production for 1940: UK 24,074, USA 13,513, Germany 13,510. From R.J. Overy, *The Air War 1939–45*, London 1980, p. 150.

<sup>79</sup> It is notable how general the agreement on British strategy was. In particular it is worth stressing the lack of a change in strategy in May 1940: there was a political rupture, but no strategic rupture. Churchill and Chamberlain worked together closely and very amicably in the War Cabinet from September 1939 to September 1940. Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty from September 1939 to May 1940, and Prime Minister and Minister of Defence thereafter; Chamberlain became Lord President of the Council, with responsibility for the domestic economy in May 1940. See

strategic offensive against Germany started in May 1940, when Germany attacked in the West, but months before the German bombing of Britain. At first the offensive was very ineffective, in part because bomber command was kept back to act as a nucleus for a much expanded force of four-engined bombers which started arriving in 1941. Britain's central contribution to the war was to be the creation of a mass air force, which, by the last half of the war, would be bombing German cities practically every night, excepting periods of so-called 'diversions'. The strategic air offensive may be compared to the artillery bombardments on the Western Front in the First World War, except that this time high explosive was carted hundreds of miles to fall on German civilians rather than German soldiers. As is well known, the effects of the offensive on German industrial capacity were negligible.

The Second World War, like the First, was a land war; it was on the Eastern Front that the war was won and lost. It was not British (or American) technology that won the war, but Red blood.<sup>20</sup> Overall, as is clear from Table I, both the US and UK pursued a much more 'capital' intensive path than did Germany.

Table I.

Volume of combat munitions production compared to numbers of military personnel 1940-1944 (thousands of 1944 US\$ per man)

Year	USA	UK	USSR	Germany
1940	2.8	1.5	1.2	1.1
1941	2.8	1.9	—	0.8
1942	5.4	2.2	1.1	0.9
1943	4.2	2.3	1.3	1.2
1944	3.7	2.2	1.4	1.4

Source: Mark Harrison, 'Resource Mobilization for World War II', *Economic History Review*, vol. xli, no. 2, 1988, Table 2, p. 175.

That Germany pursued a less 'capital' intensive path than did Britain is in part explained by the much greater emphasis Britain put on strategic bombing. However, it is important to note that the German Army was less 'capital' intensive than is usually thought: 'Too often the average person thinks of the German army as a mechanized juggernaut, having been totally deceived by marvellous German war

<sup>19</sup> (*cont.*)

David Dilks, 'The Twilight War and the Fall of France: Chamberlain and Churchill in 1940', in David Dilks, ed., *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century* Volume Two, *After 1939*, London 1981, pp. 36-65.

<sup>20</sup> John Terraine, a notable defender of British strategy in the First World War, argues strongly that both world wars in Europe were essentially land wars. To beat Germany meant destroying the German Army. In the Second World War the German Army was destroyed by the Red Army, and not by British and American bombing of German civilians and industry. He further argues that the British air war, which was largely futile, drew human and material resources from where they would have been most effectively used, in the British Army, which he sees as inferior to the British Army of 1914-18, and much inferior to the German Army. John Terraine, *The Right of the Left: The Royal Air Force in the European War 1939-1945*, London 1985.

footage showing German armoured columns rampaging across the Russian steppes, or Erwin Rommel dashing off into the desert at the head of his panzers. . . . The harsh reality, however, is that the basic means of transport in the German army was well-known to Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus, Marlborough, Frederick and Napoleon: namely, the horse.<sup>22</sup> The numbers of horses involved were huge: 590,000 in 1939; 625,000 for Barbarossa; and a total of 1,198,724 in February 1945. Wartime losses of army horses amounted to 1.5 million.<sup>23</sup> It was the British and American armies that were fully motorized.<sup>24</sup>

### *Nuclearism*

From the 1950s, Britain's defence posture involved, for the first time in peace, a Continental commitment of conscript troops on a permanent basis.<sup>25</sup> The Americans also committed themselves to a permanent US Army presence in Europe, which reduced British troop requirements.<sup>26</sup> Although Britain started its independent nuclear development project in 1946 (atom bombs and bombers), it had merely been added to a broad-based strategy founded upon a conscript army, as well as the Navy and the RAF. With rearmament, the costs of this broad-based approach became too high. In the summer of 1952 the British Chiefs of Staff met to consider grand strategy. The result, embodied in Global Strategy Paper 1952, was a policy of building up nuclear strategic air offensive capacity. This led to high-level armament production directives giving priority to the V-Bomber force and nuclear weapons. The remarkable British Defence White Paper of 1957 (which outlined policy for the 1960s) merely made brutally clear the existing trajectory of British policy: conscription was to be abolished, as was much of the Royal Air Force and the Navy. Britain would rely on an independent force of nuclear weapons, which in the 1960s would be hydrogen bombs carried by ballistic missiles.<sup>27</sup> The old historical roles of the Navy and Air Force would

<sup>22</sup> R.L. DiNardo and Austin Bay, 'Horse-Drawn Transport in the German Army', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1988, p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 132, 134, 135.

<sup>24</sup> In September 1939 the mobilized German army consisted of the following divisions: 86 infantry; 4 motorized infantry; 4 motorized light armour; 3 mountain; and 5 Panzer. It is commonly argued that Heinz Guderian, the German tank tactician, was influenced by the British military radical Major-General Fuller. It has recently been argued that British General Staff manuals were a more important source of inspiration! G.D. Sheffield, 'Blitzkrieg and Attrition: Land Operations in Europe', in Colin McInnes and G.D. Sheffield, eds., *Warfare in the Twentieth Century: Theory and Practice*, London 1988, p. 67.

<sup>25</sup> There were, of course, British troops in Germany between 1945 and 1950, but they were there as occupation troops, not as a commitment of permanent land forces for the defence of Western Europe. Montgomery, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (i.e. head of the British Army) from 1947, wanted such a commitment, but the Labour Cabinet would not give it.

<sup>26</sup> However, initial ideas for NATO strategy involved 'a division of labour, in which the United States would look after the sea lanes and provide strategic bombardment. . . while the European allies would provide ground forces' L. Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, London 1981, p. 73. The parallels with British policy before 1914 are clear.

<sup>27</sup> Colin Gordon, 'Duncan Sandys and the Independent Nuclear Deterrent', in Ian Beckett and John Gooch, *Politicians and Defence. Studies in the Formulation of British Defence Policy*, Manchester 1981.

now be taken by nuclear weapons, the ultimate destroyer of civilians and industry. Certainly, the possession of nuclear weapons involved the matter of status, but it also represented a desire to provide NATO with nuclear-armed natives rather than a greater number of Eisenhower's Own Ukanian Islanders. In the late 1950s Britain's strategic force consisted of nearly two hundred long-range nuclear bombers, giving it a nuclear capability that was still comparable with that of the United States and the USSR.

In the event, British defence policy did not go the whole way along the nuclear road in the 1960s: high-technology conventional forces were retained. For all its armed services, the proportion of R&D to defence expenditure has been particularly high: only the United States and post-De Gaulle France reach comparable levels. Thus it is not just the level of defence expenditure that is significant about British armed force, it is the continued commitment to very significant levels of technical intensity.

Table II.

Defence R&D as a percentage of total defence expenditure

	1955	1958	1961	1964	1970	early 1980s
France	—	5.58	6.04	8.34	8.90	11.50
Germany	—	1.47	3.12	3.48	5.09	—
Sweden	—	—	8.49	9.91	6.48	6.50
UK	11.20	14.70	15.50	14.00	9.05	12.70
US	7.30	10.10	14.50	15.00	11.20	11.80

Source. SIPRI Yearbook, 1972, Table 6A.5, p. 226; SIPRI Yearbook 1985, Fig. 8.3, p. 289.

Britain was the first naval power, the first aeronautical power and, in some significant respects, the first nuclear power. The country that followed Britain in this peculiar orientation of its armed force was the United States. In high-tech militarism, Britain led and the United States followed. For example, before 1914 America pursued a Blue Water policy, just as Britain did. Indeed the greatest advocate of sea power in the late nineteenth century, Admiral Mahan, was an American. He saw Britain and the United States as 'insular democracies', which eschewed mass armies, preferring a Navy: 'the mass of citizens are paying a body of men to do their fighting for them.'<sup>27</sup> The comparison can be taken further: in the First World War, Britain planned to act as the industrial base for the war effort of its continental allies and their mass armies. At the beginning of, and indeed during, the Second World War this was the role that the United States played as the 'arsenal of democracy'. The Americans also followed the British lead in stressing air power, though it was not until 1947 that a separate United States Air Force was created. More surprisingly, given that the Americans were the first to create and use nuclear weapons, the British were the first to model their strategic policy

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Bernard Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy: Ideology, Interest, and Sea Power during the Pax Britannica*, London 1986, p. 179.

around them. The Americans at first saw this as a move by Britain to renege on its conventional commitment to NATO.<sup>28</sup> However, the Americans quickly reassessed their own strategic policy, the 'New Look', and followed the British lead in placing strategic nuclear weapons at the centre of strategic policy.<sup>29</sup>

Non-nuclear 'liberal militarism' can also be seen in American policy in the Far East after the Second World War. Strategic air power was used in both Korea and Vietnam on a scale greater than in the Second World War. To take a more significant index: the tonnage of air, land and sea munitions expended per American serviceman, was eight times greater in Korea, and twenty-six times greater in Vietnam, than in the Second World War.<sup>30</sup> These engagements were militarily localized and specific, and were additional to the principal deployments of the Cold War.

#### *A New Pax Technologica?*

The ending of the Cold War and Operation 'Desert Storm' may reflect a turning point. While the nuclear element remains, the key new instrument of military strategy could become the inter-hemispheric rapid deployment force equipped with the products of the quantum electronic revolution—itself largely created by the military. Such strike forces would be deployed to police a 'new world order'. Major forces would be on permanent standby for worldwide deployment, like the Royal Navy of the Pax Britannica, and like H.G. Wells's 'Airmen' in *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), who held out the false promise of a high-tech war to end all war. While the new Pax Technologica articulates the material interests of sections of the military-industrial complex, it is also invariably accompanied by its own species of universalist idealism. In this phase British policy is subordinate to the USA. The contribution of British technology may also be minor, but the liberal-militaristic idea of the Pax Technologica is very British.

#### *The Sources of Liberal Militarism*

Why did Britain pursue a policy of liberal militarism? Two answers may be given, which both reflect a certain world-view on the part of the British elite. This was the view that Britain was essentially an economic, industrial and commercial power. The maintenance of this power required armed force, but excessive defence expenditure would undermine the real basis of its power. Related was the appreciation that Britain was small in absolute terms: it could not hope to field an army to match the German Army in size; nor could it produce, say, steel on the scale the Germans or Americans could. In other words, the British state has preferred to keep British workers in factories, rather than put them into mass armies. Having workers creating weapons to destroy enemy workers and factories, it was thought, avoided the need to put British workers into the field against German or Soviet workers.

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<sup>28</sup> Freedman, p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>30</sup> G. Kolko, *Vietnam: Anatomy of War 1940-1975*, London 1986, p. 189. See also Neil Sheehan, *The Bright Shining Lie*, London 1989, a fine study of a liberal technocrat at war



Some historians have taken these basic economic and strategic conditions to mean that appeasement was a rational strategy for Britain, and that Britain pursued such a policy from the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> I will suggest that the British elite believed that these limitations could be partially overcome by taking advantage of relative strengths, most notably in science and technology and specific classes of industrial expertise. In other words, one could hope to deploy military might incommensurate with one's absolute economic position, without undermining one's economic position. This view is supported by the fact that Britain felt particularly threatened, not by the total economic strength of its opponents, but by specific technological threats. Thus it was the rise of the German Navy before 1914, and the rise of the Luftwaffe in the 1930s, which caused the most concern. This is not to say that total economic strength was ignored; on the contrary, it was regarded as vital, but also subject to attack by British forces. If vulnerability to attack was overestimated, the importance of industrial and economic capacity was not.<sup>32</sup>

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the strengthening of political and civilian control over the two services. Furthermore, their policies were brought into closer coordination with each other and with foreign and domestic policy, through the medium of the Committee of Imperial Defence, formed in 1902. This was usually chaired by the Prime Minister. It is only since 1964, when the three service ministries were abolished, that a powerful Minister of Defence was responsible for defence policy as a whole. Before this, the Prime Minister and the Treasury had important controls over the broad orientation of defence policy.

The influence of the Treasury on defence policy is generally held to be a malign one. The Treasury is regarded, rightly, as the most liberal, *laissez faire* and powerful of departments. From these undoubted facts several misleading inferences are made. The first is that the Treasury was essentially anti-militaristic, and that it kept British expenditure comparatively low, especially in the interwar years. It thus comes as a surprise to note that in the 1920s *Britain had the highest absolute defence expenditure of any country in the world*, which was probably higher in real and absolute terms than its defence expenditure just before the First World War.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, it is assumed that the Treasury was concerned only with the *financial* aspects of defence expenditure. However, as George Peden has convincingly shown, in the 1930s the Treasury was deeply concerned with the *industrial* aspects of rearmament. Indeed, he has demonstrated that the Treasury limited defence expenditure not for doctrinaire financial reasons (as is usually

<sup>31</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, London 1988.

<sup>32</sup> Even war against pre-industrial peoples was thought of in economic terms. In the 1920s, as has been noted, the RAF pursued a policy of destroying the economic base of belligerent tribes. In post-Second World War counterinsurgency, the separation of guerrillas from their economic and logistical base was very important. The United States pursued a systematic policy of destroying the agricultural base of Indochina.

<sup>33</sup> John Ferris, 'Treasury Control, the Ten Year Rule and British Service Policies, 1919-1924', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1987, p. 865.

alleged), but rather because it wanted to ensure that expenditure was in line with the capacity of the arms industry to produce. The Treasury wanted to see this capacity increased but recognized very clearly the real limitations that industrial capacity imposed. Thirdly, it is assumed that the penny-pinching Treasury retarded the development of military technology in interwar Britain. For example, practically everything that has been written on the interwar aircraft industry blames the supposedly poor state of the aircraft industry on Treasury stinginess and what is seen as the related pacifism of the electorate.<sup>34</sup> The broader picture is radically different. From 1919 both the Cabinet and the Treasury wanted air power and mechanization as a means of reducing manpower.<sup>35</sup> In the 1930s they saw a strong air force as the cheapest and most effective way of meeting the German challenge on land, sea or air. By 1939 the Air Ministry was the largest spender of the service ministries.<sup>36</sup> The RAF, and aeronautical technology, were important beneficiaries of the much lamented Treasury stinginess and not, as is suggested in much of the aeronautical literature, one of its chief victims.

Similarly, the decision to go nuclear in the 1950s was very much influenced by economics. As the 1957 Defence White Paper put it: 'Britain's influence in the world depends first and foremost on the health of her internal economy and the success of her export trade. Without these, military power cannot in the long run be supported. It is therefore in the interests of defence that the claims of military expenditure should be considered in conjunction with the need to maintain the country's financial and economic strength.'<sup>37</sup> Economics, then, has been central to liberal militarism and its high-technology orientation. Unfortunately we do not know in detail what role the Treasury played in defence policy in the 1950s, but we do know it was increasingly hostile to the aircraft industry, and was a key opponent of the TSR2.<sup>38</sup>

### The Liberal Militarists

Of course, the Treasury was not the only influence on the broad patterns of British defence policy. Senior ministers had a key influence too. Unfortunately, however, the historiography of British politics is almost silent on strategic thought. It is thus difficult to make an assessment of the contribution of ministers to strategy. Nevertheless, when we consider the most obviously influential ministerial strategists, we find something remarkable but unremarked upon: they were particularly

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<sup>34</sup> As Barnett expresses it 'The British aircraft industry as a whole had to be artificially kept alive by means of Air Ministry orders . . . and then only in tiny quantities because of the partial unilateral disarmament then being pursued by the British governments under the combined influence of moralizing internationalism and financial stringency.' Barnett, *The Audit of War*, p. 129.

<sup>35</sup> Ferris, 'Treasury Control', pp. 868, 871.

<sup>36</sup> The above is drawn from George Peden's pathbreaking work, *British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932-1939*, Edinburgh 1979.

<sup>37</sup> *Defence. Outline of Future Policy*, Cmd 124, (1957), para. 6.

<sup>38</sup> David Henderson, *Isaacsons and Design*, London 1986; S. Zuckerman, *Monkeys, Miss and Missiles*, London 1988.

interested in science, technology and education.<sup>39</sup> The central figures in the creation of defence policy in the Edwardian years were A.J. Balfour, Prime Minister 1902–1905; R.B. Haldane, Secretary of State for War 1906–1912; and Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1911–1915. Balfour, as Prime Minister, created the Committee of Imperial Defence,<sup>40</sup> and strongly supported the modernization of the Navy, including a major reform of officer education. Haldane, another Blue Water man, undertook major reforms to the British Army, creating the well-equipped British Expeditionary Force and the Territorial Army. He was also responsible for launching British aeronautics. Churchill was a very energetic First Lord of the Admiralty who created the Royal Naval Air Service and started the building of tanks. He was behind the Gallipoli expedition, a classic attempt to find a naval solution to the war by making Balkan armies fight the Germans and give the British the ability to supply the Russians with arms. Balfour replaced Churchill at the Admiralty in May 1915, and served till December 1916, when he became Foreign Secretary.

The influence of all three on defence policy after the war remained important. Balfour was in the 1920s an influential voice in keeping the RAF as an independent entity. Haldane joined the 1924 Labour Government as Lord Chancellor and, at his request, as Chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defence.<sup>41</sup> Churchill's influence was the most longstanding and important: he was an important advocate of air power in the 1920s when as joint Secretary of State for Air and War he instituted 'air control' in the Middle East,<sup>42</sup> replacing ground troops with bomber aircraft. In the 1930s, and during the war, he put the major emphasis of British policy on the strategic bombing of Germany. As First Lord of the Admiralty, 1939–40, he was responsible for the Norway campaign, designed to prevent the Germans getting iron ore. It was under Churchill in the 1950s that the major decisions to build up a British nuclear deterrent were taken, a policy brought fully into the light of day by his son-in-law, Duncan Sandys, in 1957, under Harold Macmillan's premiership.

Balfour, Haldane and Churchill were peculiarly interested in science and technology. Balfour and Haldane were the two leading intellectuals in British politics in the first quarter of this century; they were

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<sup>39</sup> The interconnections between defence policy and science and education policy in the Edwardian period, especially as mediated through Balfour and Haldane (both 'Coefficients') have still to be fully explored. Two important contributions are: F.M. Turner, 'Public Science in Britain, 1880–1919', *Ius*, vol. 71, 1980; and Geoffrey Price, 'Science, Idealism and Higher Education in England' Arnold, Green and Haldane', *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 11, 1986, pp. 5–16. Peter Alter, in his *Reluctant Patron: Science and the State in Britain, 1850–1920*, Oxford 1987, practically ignores the roles of the War Office, Admiralty and the Ministry of Munitions, while acknowledging the central role of war and preparation for war in the changing of the relationship between science and the state.

<sup>40</sup> This committee was important not just because it dealt with interservice coordination and the relationship between defence and foreign policy but because it was central to the modernization of the central machinery of government. The CIO had a secretariat which during the war became the Cabinet secretariat.

<sup>41</sup> R.B. Haldane, *An Autobiography*, London 1929, p. 319ff.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Charles Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, London 1986.

also the central political figures in the evolution of science and education policy. Balfour steered the 1902 Education Act through Parliament; as First Lord of the Admiralty he created the Board for Invention and Research. As Lord President of the Council in the 1920s he was responsible for civil science policy. He chaired the Medical Research Council and formed the Committee for Civil Research, which he saw as a civil and scientific counterpart to the Committee of Imperial Defence—the idea had been Haldane's. Haldane was a leading figure in the expansion of British University provision in the Edwardian period. He was closely involved, for example, in the creation of Imperial College, London; he was President of the British Science Guild; he established the Advisory Committee on Aeronautics, and was instrumental in setting up the Medical Research Committee. Haldane was a Scottish and German educated Hegelian: when appointed Secretary of State for War, the Army Council asked him what kind of Army he wanted, to which he replied 'A Hegelian Army'!<sup>43</sup>

Churchill was no intellectual by these standards, but he was certainly interested in science and technology. While First Lord before the First World War he learnt to fly, to the dismay of his colleagues. From the 1930s on he had as his close personal friend and scientific adviser Frederick Lindemann (Lord Cherwell), who went into Churchill's cabinet in the 1950s as Paymaster General.<sup>44</sup> If we consider Harold Macmillan and Duncan Sandys, we again find particular expertise and interest in industry and science. Macmillan had been a publisher in the interwar years, and as such he subsidized his loss-making scientific journal *Nature*, the voice of reform-minded scientists. He also took a great interest in industrial policy, as may be seen in *The Middle Way* of 1938. Duncan Sandys spent most of his career in supply and defence jobs. Like Macmillan, he was parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Supply during the war. He was Minister of Supply in the early 1950s, then Minister of Defence, and then Minister of Aviation, where he carried out the rationalizations of the aircraft industry implicit in the 1957 White Paper.

If we look at other key defence advisers and civil servants, we also find evidence of technical knowledge and interest in the application of technology to war. Colonel Maurice Hankey, a Royal Marine artillery specialist, was the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence from 1912 to 1938; he was also the first Secretary of the Cabinet (1916), and remained so until 1938. He entered the government as Minister without Portfolio in 1939. He was also chairman of the Scientific Advisory Council to the War Cabinet. Another key figure in 1930s rearmament advice was Lord Weir, a Scottish engineer and industrialist. He was in charge of munitions production in Scotland in the First World War, went to London to take charge of aircraft production at the

<sup>43</sup> Haldane, *An Autobiography*, p. 185.

<sup>44</sup> Lord Cherwell was particularly keen on the development of British nuclear weapons 'If we are unable to make bombs ourselves and have to rely entirely on the United States army for this vital weapon we shall sink to the rank of a second class nation, like the native levies who were allowed small arms but not artillery.' Quoted in M.M. Gowing, *Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy, 1945-1952* Volume 1, *Policy Making*, London 1974, p. 407.

Ministry of Munitions, and became Secretary of State for Air. In the 1930s he had three key roles: adviser to the key ministerial rearmament committee; one of the three industrial advisers to the Principal Supply Officers' Committee of the CID; and close adviser to Lord Swinton, the Secretary of State for Air between 1935 and 1938.

Sir John Anderson was a particularly interesting and important figure. He had studied chemistry at Leipzig before joining the civil service. He worked in Ireland during the early 1920s, and as Permanent Secretary at the Home Office was responsible for the preparations for the General Strike. Between 1932 and 1937 he was Governor of Bengal, in a period of serious anti-British agitation. On retirement he was put on the boards of ICI and the Midland Bank. Remarkably, he was brought into the government after Munich to become Lord Privy Seal and was responsible for Air Raid Precautions (hence the 'Anderson Shelter'). In 1940 he became Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, and in 1941 he replaced Chamberlain as Lord President of the Council. He became Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1943. He was the minister responsible for the British atomic bomb projects, and chaired the wartime Machinery of Government Committee (which may be compared with Haldane's similar task in 1918). He was Churchill's designated successor after Eden during the war, an arrangement which flew in the face of constitutional propriety.

### State Machinery for Warlike Supply

Liberal militarism required high-technology armaments which could only be obtained by selective intervention in industry. However, in the historiography of British industrial policy, the service departments and the specialist military supply departments have, on the whole, been ignored, especially in peacetime. In part this is because students of industrial policy have regarded defence as somehow different, without specifying, in historical and empirical terms, how defence industrial policy has in fact differed from civil industrial policy. In wartime the supply agencies cannot be ignored, but historians tend to see them as emergency innovations rather than as long-standing parts of the British state that expanded their activities in wartime. It is therefore worth outlining their development. The two old established service departments, the Admiralty and the War Office, both had procurement organizations and their own industrial capacity in the form of Royal Dockyards and the Royal Ordnance Factories. Together with Armstrong Whitworth and Vickers, both heavily engaged in armaments, these two enterprises figure among the top ten manufacturing employers in Edwardian Britain. In the First World War a civilian Ministry of Munitions progressively took over the supply of armaments of most kinds from the War Office and, to a lesser extent, from the Admiralty. By the end of the war it was also supplying the new Royal Air Force. At the end of the First World War the question of the future of the Ministry of Munitions naturally arose: should the three service departments (Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry) take over from it, or should something like it remain? The Machinery of Government Committee of 1918 recommended that it should be converted to a peacetime Ministry of Supply, and although this was approved by the Cabinet, the decision was

reversed in 1921. In the interwar years, then, there were three procurement organizations, coordinated through the Committee of Imperial Defence.<sup>45</sup>

In the 1930s the supply branches of the Service Ministries were much expanded, notably that of the Air Ministry. Just before war broke out a Ministry of Supply was created, which took over War Office procurement under the very important but largely unknown Ministry of Supply Act, 1939, which gave the state great powers over industry. The Ministry of Aircraft Production (created in May 1940) was essentially the renamed and expanded production branch of the Air Ministry.<sup>46</sup> During the war these two ministries were to acquire very wide-ranging responsibilities. The Ministry of Supply operated the basic economic controls over raw materials, and the Ministry of Aircraft Production became responsible for, for example, the whole electronics industry. It was these two ministries, together with the Admiralty, which remained responsible for shipbuilding, that controlled the most important sections of British industry. The Board of Trade was marginal, concerning itself primarily with the supply and rationing of civilian goods.

Sir Richard Stafford Cripps, the longest serving Minister of Aircraft Production, argued for the creation of a single postwar supply ministry separate from the service ministries.<sup>47</sup> Cripps's proposal was backed by only one other minister, and the coalition government did not come to a decision on the question.<sup>48</sup> The incoming Labour government, despite the continuing opposition of service chiefs and two service ministers, merged the Ministries of Supply and Aircraft Production, but left the Admiralty in charge of shipbuilding.<sup>49</sup> In 1959 army supply functions were ceded to the War Office. Nevertheless, the so-called Ministry of Aviation remained the largest procurement agency, responsible not just for aircraft and guided weapons, but also, for example, for electronics. The Ministry of Aviation, as is discussed further below, was merged into the Ministry of Technology in the late 1960s. In the early 1970s all the defence procurement

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<sup>45</sup> N. Chester and F.M.G. Willson, *The Organization of British Central Government, 1914-1964*, London 1968, p. 225. From 1924 coordination of the supply activities of the three services was undertaken by the Principal Supply Officers' Committee of Imperial Defence (Chester and Willson, p. 228).

<sup>46</sup> However, the conventional historiography of the Second World War stresses the discontinuities, especially in the case of the Ministry of Aircraft Production. Its establishment was one of Churchill's very first acts as Prime Minister, and he put in Lord Beaverbrook as Minister. Beaverbrook saw himself performing the same role that Lloyd George had done in the First World War as First Minister of Munitions, and this is how historians have seen him. In fact Beaverbrook did much to disrupt a well-functioning organization that had provided the capacity for the massive wartime expansion of aircraft production. See Alex Robertson, 'Lord Beaverbrook and the Supply of Aircraft, 1940-1941', in A. Slaven and D.H. Aldcroft, eds., *Business, Banking and Urban History: Essays in Honour of S.G. Checkland*, Edinburgh 1982.

<sup>47</sup> The Organisation of Supply, Memorandum by the Minister of Aircraft Production, 21 November 1944, ADM 117794, MG (44)28.

<sup>48</sup> Organisation of Supply, Memorandum by the Chairman of the Machinery of Government Committee (Sir John Anderson), 20 December 1944, CAB 66/59, WP (44)713.

<sup>49</sup> CAB 192/2 CP (45)177, 178, 181 and 197, CAB 128/1 CM (45)37, Conclusions, 2 October 1945.

agencies were merged into a unified Procurement Executive in the Ministry of Defence, which exists to this day.

### The Nature of Supply Ministries

Service and Supply departments have differed in significant ways from most British state agencies. First, their functions have been different: the Ministry of Defence, in its own words, 'is principally concerned with the management of physical resources rather than the performance of advisory, regulatory or legislative functions. In this it differs from most Whitehall Departments.'<sup>30</sup> The Ministry of Defence and its Procurement Executive and its ancestors were not merely controlling ministries. They constantly had to make technical choices and investment decisions, and to monitor production. They pursued highly dirigiste policies, dealing with individual firms, even nationalizing them when necessary.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, although we know very little about the ethos of these supply departments, we know enough to suggest that it differed from that of the civil service as commonly understood. Take the Admiralty before and during the First World War. It was dominated by Admiral Fisher and senior officers promoted by him, who, like Fisher, were technical experts. One, Sir Henry Jackson, First Sea Lord under Balfour, has recently been credited as one of the inventors of radio.<sup>32</sup> The much maligned Air Ministry of the late 1930s was in fact a very active and interventionist ministry, whose production and R&D department was headed by Air Marshal Sir Wilfrid Freeman, an officer of exceptional quality. He was displaced by Beaverbrook and his business cronies in 1940; but between 1942 and 1945 he was Chief Executive of the Ministry of Aircraft Production.<sup>33</sup> A glimpse of the overall tone of the Ministry of Aviation (1959–1967) was given by the economist David Henderson in his 1985 Reith Lectures. He contrasted the macro-economic thinking of the Treasury with the Do-It-Yourself Economics—naïve technocratic enthusiasm for high technology—of the Ministry of Aviation.<sup>34</sup> Another, more recent, contrast is provided by the Westland affair, which was in part a battle between the *dirigiste* Procurement Executive of the Ministry of Defence and the more liberal Department of Trade and Industry.

This difference in ethos is related not just to function but to the nature of the personnel of supply departments. Different kinds of officials ran these departments: 'ordinary' civil servants, serving officers (including scientifically and technically trained officers), and civilian

<sup>30</sup> *Statement on the Defence Estimates 1983*, vol. 1, Cmnd. 8951–1, p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> D.E.H. Edgerton, 'Technical Innovation, Industrial Capacity and Efficiency: Public Ownership and the British Military Aircraft Industry, 1935–1948', *Business History*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1984, pp. 247–79.

<sup>32</sup> Rowland F. Pocock, *The Early British Radio Industry*, Manchester 1988. See also J.T. Sumida, *In Defence of Naval Supremacy*, London 1989.

<sup>33</sup> Freeman's deputy in the 1930s, who also had a seat on the Air Council, the supreme body of the Ministry and Air Force, was Ernest Lemon, an engineer and vice-president of the LMS Railway. Engineering and management consultants were also brought into the Air Ministry. In addition, the Secretary of State had an Advisory Panel of Industrialists, made up largely of chairmen of such companies as GKN and Anglo-Iranian (BP).

<sup>34</sup> Henderson, *Innocence and Design*.

scientists and technologists. Although we now know a fair amount about the ideology and ethos of civil servants, we know very little about the thinking of serving officers on technical and industrial matters, or that of scientific civil servants. While we can characterize the civil service as broadly liberal, such a description cannot apply to the British officer corps, or, probably, to the scientific civil service. Thus, although the general parameters of British defence policy did come from a broadly liberal conception of political economy, neither the armed forces, nor the supply departments were themselves liberal in outlook, either economically or, needless to say, socially and politically: liberal militarism did not imply a liberal industrial policy for armaments production.

### The Industrial Base of Liberal Militarism

It may be objected that the story told above is all very well, but that Britain simply did not have the industrial capacity and expertise to provide the state with the modern weapons it required. If one relied on most of what has been written on British industry this century, one would probably be forced to agree. We have to be ready to discount the lurid stories of industrial incompetence and inevitable decline, and to be wary of arguments drawn indiscriminately across industrial sectors. A comparative study of the performance of British civil and military industry across the twentieth century has yet to be undertaken, and therefore I will make no claims about relative performance. I will merely show that the British arms industry has been a very important part of British manufacturing industry, certainly more so than is implied in much of the literature. In this section and the next I will confine my material to the period up to 1945.

In the Edwardian years naval shipbuilders and armament firms, including the publicly owned Royal Ordnance Factories and Royal Dockyards, dominate the top ten manufacturing employers in Britain. Indeed, as an American historian has put it, the Admiralty created 'the modern military-industrial complex [which] suddenly came of age and began, in the very citadel of European liberalism, to exhibit a wayward will of its own'.<sup>25</sup> What is less well known is that even in the mid 1930s, employment in the Royal Ordnance Factories, Royal Dockyards, and in the merged Vickers and Armstrong Whitworth company, was comparable to what it had been in 1907. Certainly in the interwar years, arms firms were not so well represented among the top ten manufacturing firms as they had been; but if we look at the top one hundred manufacturing firms in 1935, we find a number of substantial arms firms: Vickers (44,162), Royal Dockyards (31,680), Royal Ordnance (14,231), Hawker Siddeley [producing Hawker, Armstrong Whitworth, Avro, and Gloster aircraft and Armstrong Siddeley aero-engines] (13,800), Beardmore (8,000), Rolls-Royce (6,900), Bristol Aeroplane (4,200).

It is a commonplace among historians that the British aircraft industry barely existed in the 1920s and early 1930s. However, this picture

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<sup>25</sup> W. H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power. Technology, Armed Force and Society since AD 1,000*, Oxford 1983, p. 285



is derived from looking forwards from 1918 and backwards from the Second World War. If we look at the industry at the time, we find that it was, broadly speaking, being expanded; and was at least as big as any aircraft industry in the world. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the British aircraft industry was the largest exporter in the world.<sup>56</sup> There is also a tendency to give too much weight to the civil aircraft industry, which everywhere in the world was tiny compared with the military industry.<sup>57</sup>

Neither the shipbuilding nor the aircraft industries were mass-production industries in our period. The aircraft industry nearly was, but there were good reasons for not importing the mass-production ethos into it. The tendency to see non-mass production industries as backward is, however, very strong; Anderson, for example, sees shipbuilding as a leftover from the industrial revolution: 'an industry relying on a montage of specialized skills rather than standardized mass production'. He goes on to describe the shipbuilding rivers, the Tyne and Clyde, Mersey and Lagan, as 'older complexes'.<sup>58</sup> One would not guess from this account that all these centres were developed in the late nineteenth century, and that it was in this age of steam and steel that British shipbuilding, merchant and naval, acquired its dominance. Nor was this success in shipbuilding just the forced flower of a deluded Blue Water strategy: the products of British shipbuilding were the first preference of other nations' merchant and naval fleets. Furthermore, warships incorporated many important new innovations in the Edwardian years: they were packed with electrical equipment, including radio; they utilized a whole series of new steels, steam turbines rather than reciprocating steam engines, and oil- rather than coal-fired boilers. There is also a tendency to see the aircraft industry as backward because it did not mass-produce in the interwar years. But nowhere in the world were aircraft mass-produced. There were two good reasons for this: aircraft were much more complex than cars, and secondly, they were required in much smaller numbers. In addition, governments, and especially the British government, did not want to be stuck with thousands of obsolete aircraft. Instead it pursued a policy of stimulating the production of prototypes, and a deliberate policy of

<sup>56</sup> *The Aeroplane*, 11 November 1936, p. 588 noted that in aggregate Britain had been the largest exporter since the First World War. The British share of the world arms trade, which excludes ships and aircraft, shows Britain with 28 per cent, France with 29 per cent, and the USA with 9 per cent. *Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of and Trading in Arms, 1935/36, Minutes of Evidence*, p. 648. See also Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane*.

<sup>57</sup> For example, Barnett argues that the British aircraft industry failed in the interwar years. The evidence he presents concerns civil aviation. He does not recognize that throughout the interwar years the aircraft industry everywhere in the world was largely a military supplier. For Britain in 1934 the market for aircraft was as follows: Air Ministry, £6 million; exports, mostly of military types, £1.5 million; home civil sales, £0.5 million (UDC Memorandum, *Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of and Trading in Arms, 1935/36, Minutes of Evidence*, p. 195.) Even in the United States the Army and the Navy accounted for at least 50 per cent of sales between 1927 and 1933, rising to at least two thirds in 1936. American aircraft exports rose from under 10 per cent of its production in the 1920s to over 40 per cent in the late 1930s, largely because of sales of military types. Elisabeth E. Freudenthal, 'The Aviation Business in the 1930s', in G.R. Simonson, ed., *The History of the American Aircraft Industry: An Anthology*, Cambridge, Mass. 1968.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, p. 43. In shipbuilding, the 'older complexes' were in the South!

small-scale production to keep many design teams in existence. In other words, they wanted to stimulate innovation in products rather than in processes. The idea was that when expansion came new models would be available for large-scale production.

The efficiency of British aircraft production figures prominently in Barnett's argument about the British war economy. Although the aircraft industry was at 'the centre of gravity of the entire British war effort',<sup>59</sup> he argues that it suffered from the same fundamental defects as the older industrial sectors. He finds the productivity record particularly shocking; British productivity was lower than American, and even than German, in terms of weight of aircraft produced per man-day. He produces two sets of comparative figures. In the first he calculates a figure for Britain of 1.19 lb per man-day for 1944, which he compares with reported figures for Germany of 1.5 (1943) and 2.76 for the United States (1944). The second comparison is of peaks in 1944: Britain, 1.28 (March 1944); Germany, 1.93 (best quarter, 1944); United States, 3.0 (peak, 1944). Barnett's calculations of British productivity are unfortunately both wrong and largely meaningless. Wrong because to calculate productivity for 1944 as a whole, and for March 1944, he uses the same figure for employment, 510,000, which is at best a figure for 1943.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore it is not clear that the calculations made for Germany and America were comparable.

A properly comparative measurement made during the war by a senior engineer in the Ministry of Aircraft Production found US production to be 75 per cent more efficient than British, but that this difference was accounted for by the fact that American production runs were longer than British, and that British factories tended to be smaller. But this in itself does not damn the British effort: it is one of the peculiarities of aircraft manufacture that productivity increases rapidly with volume and rate of production, independently of technology used and of the initial skill of workers and management. There were sound military reasons for paying the (known) productivity price of relatively short production runs.<sup>61</sup> But it has to be stressed that these productivity comparisons, as well as being immensely difficult to carry out, were in the end meaningless. As a former senior planner at the Ministry of Aircraft Production, and scathing critic of the fetishization of the meaningless numbers resurrected by Barnett from deserved obscurity, put it: 'nobody was really interested in the weight of aircraft produced, but in its fighting power'.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Barnett, *The Audit of War*, p. 146.

<sup>60</sup> He gives Public Record Office reference CAB 87/13 PR (43)98 as his source. (43) dates the document 1943! Another bizarre feature of the calculations is that he converts yearly output figures per worker into output-per-day figures by dividing by 365. But even if every day of the year was a working day, it was not the case that all the workers employed were working every day of the year.

<sup>61</sup> Eric Mensforth, 'Airframe Production', *Proceedings of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers*, vol. 156, 1947, pp. 24-38.

<sup>62</sup> E. Devons, *Planning in Practice: Essays in Aircraft Planning in Wartime*, Cambridge 1950, p. 150. He noted that there lingered in MAP 'the impression that it was possible in some way to measure the efficiency of the production process quite separately from the usefulness of what was produced' (p. 150). Devons's book, though little known, is a classic exposition of the difficulties and dangers of planning.

Barnett gives the strong impression that trade unions in the British aircraft industry resisted 'dilution' of skilled work. This is simply not the case. British and American levels of dilution, as measured by the proportion of women workers, were almost the same. It was in fact the German aircraft workers who resisted dilution, until 1944!<sup>63</sup> In his careful comparative study of wartime air forces and aircraft production, Richard Overy notes: 'In Germany the aircraft factories were slow to adopt new methods and were permeated by many built-in inefficiencies which it proved hard to overcome. Handwork methods survived through the legacy of the early industry in the 1930s and because of the high degree of skill acquired by the individual Meister (the master craftsman) through a long and rigorous apprenticeship. The workforce resisted attempts to undermine the skills or dilute the workforce by using new methods and semi-skilled labour.'<sup>64</sup> Barnett is half aware of this, but with remarkable insouciance comments that: 'In Germany the skilled craftsman resisted dilution out of a mistaken belief that it would mar the superb quality of the German engineering product; in Britain they resisted it simply in defence of privilege!'<sup>65</sup> This is not an isolated example of sheer prejudice: most of the faults Barnett finds in the British aircraft industry—emphasis on design rather than production; inter-firm rivalry; and so forth—were probably to be found to a greater degree in the German rather than the British industry.

### The Scientific and Technological Base

We know remarkably little about science and technology in twentieth-century Britain. Such literature as there is concentrates on two aspects: the civil 'science policy' of the state; and science in wartime, which is seen largely as an influx of civil scientists into the state machine—the wartime scientific and technical successes are seen as examples of the creativity of civil boffins when put to work on national programmes.<sup>66</sup> The emphasis on civil R&D has led to misleading generalizations about state support for R&D, and to a neglect of privately funded R&D. Missing is an appreciation of the importance of military-funded research and development in peacetime, carried out in state research establishments and in the arms industry. Throughout the twentieth century, defence R&D has been very significantly higher than state civil R&D, and for much of the century it has been larger than privately funded R&D also.

There is another significant problem with the literature on British science and technology in the twentieth century. It is assumed that the state, the military and elite educational institutions, were anti-scientific and anti-industrial, and indeed that the linkages between these institutions prevented the development of modern, science-based elite education. For example, it is almost routinely argued that

<sup>63</sup> R.J. Overy, *The Air War 1939–1945*, London 1980, p. 174.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Barnett, *The Ends of War*, p. 156.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Peter Alter, *The Reluctant Patron*, Oxford 1987; Philip Gummett, *Scientists in Whitehall*, Manchester 1980; H. Rose and S. Rose, *Science and Society*, Harmondsworth 1969; N. Vig, *Science and Technology in British Politics*, Oxford 1968.

the orientation of British public schools towards the Army, and the home and Imperial civil service, reinforced the anti-scientific and anti-industrial orientation of these schools. It thus comes as a surprise to find that a great deal of science was taught in English public schools by the end of the nineteenth century, and that one of the main reasons for this was the entrance requirements of the two military training institutions, the Royal Military College, Sandhurst (Infantry and Cavalry) and the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich (Engineers and Artillery).<sup>67</sup> The Navy did things differently: its officers were not educated in public schools, but were instead taken to the Navy's own public school, where a great deal of science and mathematics was taught. Many officers went on to specialist technical education: for example, in gunnery, torpedoes and so on, which provided specialist training. Engineer officers, who dealt with the ships' engines, came from lower-status groups, and were recruited into the Navy from different routes. However, from 1902 a 'New Scheme' of naval education brought together the education of engineer and other naval officers: all would have to pursue a common curriculum before specializing.

It is also assumed that the elite universities were hostile, if not to pure science, then to applied science and especially engineering. It is thus surprising to find that the largest university engineering school, from the Edwardian period into the 1940s, was to be found at the University of Cambridge. This school had close links with the services. The first Professor, Alfred Ewing, became Director of Naval Education in 1902 to implement the 'New Scheme'. His successor at Cambridge directed aeronautical research in the First World War, and his pupils were to play a leading role in aeronautical research in the interwar years.

Table III.

Research and Development spending in the United Kingdom  
(£ million at current prices)

	1950/1	1955/6	1961/2	1964/5
Ministry of Supply R&D <sup>1</sup>	89	157	—	—
Ministry of Aviation R&D <sup>1</sup>	—	—	210	252
State-funded R&D in aircraft industry <sup>2</sup>	30	65	101	110
DSIR R&D <sup>1</sup>	5	6	15	25
Total state-funded R&D <sup>1</sup>	114	196	289	434
Industry-funded R&D <sup>3</sup>	40	77	248	328

Sources: <sup>1</sup> Civil Estimates, Research and Development Table. <sup>2</sup> Plowden Report, Cmnd 2853 (1965) Appendix D, Table 1 (Calendar years). <sup>3</sup> Cmnd 3007 Summary Table 2, covers 'Private industry, public corporations, research associations and other organizations' 1950 figure is estimate for private financial industrial R&D, in C.F. Carter and B.R. Williams, *Industry and Technical Progress*, London 1957, p. 44.

Indeed, in the interwar years state-funded aeronautical R&D was the largest single category of R&D spending: the Air Ministry was easily

<sup>67</sup> David Layton, *Interpreters of Science. A History of the Association for Science Education*, London 1984, pp. 184–90.

the largest R&D spending institution in Britain. In the mid 1920s it was spending £1.34 million on R&D, compared with £0.98 million by the Admiralty, and £0.49 million by the War Office. The largely civil Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, which has received quite disproportionate attention from historians, was spending a mere £0.38 million. For the mid 1930s we can make a comparison with industrial R&D spending. In 1935/36 the Air Ministry spent £1.25 million on R&D, while British industry spent, though the figure is an underestimate, £2.7 million. ICI, the largest industrial R&D performer, spent £0.59 million.<sup>68</sup> Even more staggering is the importance of aeronautical R&D in the 1950s, as is shown in Table III.

### The Military Origins of the 'White Heat'

In the historical literature on the development of industrial policy during the war, it is the proposals put forward by the Board of Trade, and the attendant arguments, which have attracted the attention.<sup>69</sup> These were essentially beefed-up 1930s cartelization schemes. What has not been recognized is that a very different set of industrial policies, based not on the Board of Trade but on the supply ministries, were also considered. During the war, Cripps had argued for a general industrial role for 'expert' ministries, in opposing the Board of Trade's industrial policy proposals and the whole thrust of liberal-Keynesian arguments for demand management.<sup>70</sup> Although no explicit decision was taken by the Labour government on the use of the Ministry of Supply for civil industrial purposes, the Ministry of Supply retained major civil responsibilities—for example, in textile machinery, motors, iron and steel, civil aviation. It can rightly be called the British Ministry of Industry and Technology, dwarfing the efforts of the Board of Trade and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in this respect.

In 1945 Cripps became President of the Board of Trade, and the industrial policies he pursued were largely inherited from that department. They were industry-based, tripartite, and confined to the backward industries under the care of the Board of Trade. These policies have been taken to characterize the policy of the Labour government as a whole. But Harold Wilson, Cripps's successor at the Board of Trade, and well known for his 'bonfire of controls', increasingly came to see the Board of Trade's industrial policies as useless. He wanted to

<sup>68</sup> R. MacLeod and A. Andrews, 'The Committee of Civil Research: Scientific Advice for Economic Development, 1925-1930', *Minerva*, vol. vii, 1969, p. 699; D.E.H. Edgerton, 'Science and Technology in British Business History', *Business History*, vol. 29, 1987, pp. 100-102; R. McKinnon Wood, *Aircraft Manufacturers*, London 1935.

<sup>69</sup> For example, Keith Middlemas, *Power, Competition and the State*. Volume 1, *Britain in Search of Balance, 1940-1961*, London 1986; and Correlli Barnett, *Audit of War*. For a systematic comparison of military and civil industrial policies during the Second World War, see D.E.H. Edgerton, 'State Intervention in British Manufacturing Industry, 1931-1951: A Comparative Study of State Policy for the Military Aircraft and Cotton Textile Industries', Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1986.

<sup>70</sup> Government and the Major Industries, Memorandum by the Minister of Aircraft Production, 8 March 1944, CAB 87/7, 1(44)42; and Additional Memorandum, 31 March 1944, CAB 87/7, 1(44)69.

replace the global controls and industry-based policies with highly discriminatory controls over individual firms. The government, he argued, should look to military-industry style provision of guaranteed markets and state competition, as well as the appointment of civil servants to the boards of each of the largest 2,000 to 9,000 largest companies in Britain. Wilson even argued that the wartime powers to take over the management and ownership of inefficient firms should be made permanent, and that it would be necessary to 'resist all attempts to limit them to defence cases or to firms supplying goods for the public services'.<sup>71</sup> Wilson's paper was widely discussed at senior government and party level, but its radical proposals were rejected.

In the 1950s, under the Conservative governments, the Ministry of Supply lost a number of its functions, so that by the late 1950s it was very largely a procurement organization only.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, for certain ministers it continued to act as a basis for the development of an interventionist industrial strategy. Aubrey Jones, as Conservative Minister of Supply in the late 1950s, suggested that his ministry be converted into a Ministry of Technology 'to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from the military to the civil field; and to utilize the expertise developed in the placing of military research and development contracts to put it also at the disposal of civil industry'.<sup>73</sup> This was opposed by Service departments and other ministers,<sup>74</sup> and Jones resigned over this in 1959.<sup>75</sup> In that year the Ministry of Supply lost its Army supply functions to the War Office, and was renamed the Ministry of Aviation.

In the early 1960s Harold Wilson considered expanding Aviation as a Ministry for Industry. But for the scandals surrounding the cancellation of Blue Streak, Ferranti's overcharging on defence contracts, and the opposition of some scientists, this might have become Labour Party policy. Instead the Labour Party espoused a more limited policy of using state R&D facilities for civil purposes to create new industries, backed up by civil analogues of military development contracts.<sup>76</sup> The 1964 Labour government created a Ministry of Technology, controlling atomic energy, the National Research and Development Corporation (which Wilson had created in 1948), and the industrial sections of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research. In addition it was given a sponsorship role for so-called 'bridgehead

<sup>71</sup> Harold Wilson, 'The State and Private Industry', *PARM* 8/n83. See also David Edgerton, 'Whatever Happened to the British Warfare State?', in H. Mercer et al., *The Labour Government and Private Industry 1945-1951*, Edinburgh 1991.

<sup>72</sup> Chester and Willson, p. 239.

<sup>73</sup> Aubrey Jones, *Britain's Economy: The Roots of Stagnation*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 85-6, Appendix 1.

<sup>74</sup> *Vig, Science and Technology*, p. 31.

<sup>75</sup> In the early 1960s Jones continued to argue for centralized machinery to balance defence and civil R&D, the balance between industries, and between research and application. This could only be done, he argued, through the Ministry of Aviation. J.B. Poole and K. Andrews, eds., *The Government of Science in Britain*, London 1972, pp. 177-80. Jones went on to be chairman of the Labour government's National Prices and Incomes Board.

<sup>76</sup> This was the main burden of Harold Wilson's famous 'White Heat' speech at the 1963 Labour Party Conference.

industries': machine tools, computers, electronics and telecommunications. But as was pointed out at the time, despite its name, it did not have control over the major R&D efforts of government, which came under the Ministry of Aviation. However, it had been Harold Wilson's intention to merge Technology and Aviation, and he did so in February 1967. Into this already large ministry were added many of the Board of Trade's functions, including sponsorship of the textile and chemical industries, the Ministry of Fuel and Power, and the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation. This new expanded Ministry of Technology was—despite its name—the most comprehensive industry ministry Britain has had in peacetime.<sup>77</sup> What was particularly remarkable was that one industrial ministry controlled practically the whole of industrial policy and the most sophisticated and expensive elements of procurement policy. The creation and extension of the Ministry of Technology was a serious attempt to apply to the civil sector policies long practised in the military sector. This is confirmed when we consider the Ministry's major piece of legislation, the Industrial Expansion Act, 1968. 'Mintech' had acquired a whole range of strong but specific powers over certain industries, including defence industries, under the Ministry of Supply Act, 1939, as amended and updated. The Industrial Expansion Act generalized these powers to all industries.<sup>78</sup>

The Ministry of Technology in this form lasted for little more than two years. Edward Heath, although widely regarded as the creator of super-ministries, embracing whole areas of government policy, in fact dismantled Mintech. The procurement functions, the largest in terms of staff, were put into a newly created Procurement Executive in the Ministry of Defence. This Procurement Executive is still in existence, and has not suffered the vicissitudes of the Department of Trade and Industry, into which the remainder of Mintech was merged. Analysts persist in seeing his creation of the Department of Trade and Industry as a super-ministry, ignoring the fact that Mintech had wider responsibilities.<sup>79</sup> This is, however, a reflection of a wider misunderstanding of Mintech. For example, Young and Lowe argue that 'The fundamental importance of the growth of Min Tech was the institutionalization of the principle of discrimination, and the overturning of the traditional attitude of neutrality', a description that only makes sense if the history of procurement is ignored.<sup>80</sup> Harold Wilson was one of the very few, in or out of government, who understood the distinctiveness of supply departments and the expertise they could bring to civil industrial policy. As a consequence of this insight he created a unique single military-civil ministry for industry, as well as reducing the

<sup>77</sup> In his diary Crossman noted that 'It looks as if Harold has taken a great deal of care and trouble in the planning of what he really cares about, Benn's new Ministry of Industry, Harold's first love.' Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister* Volume III, London 1977, p. 676, entry for Sunday, 12 October 1969.

<sup>78</sup> See Tony Benn, *House of Commons Debates*, vol. 757, 1 February 1968, cols. 1576–8.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall*, London 1988.

<sup>80</sup> S. Young with A. V. Lowe, *Intervention in the Mixed Economy: The Evolution of Industrial Policy, 1964–1972*, London 1974, p. 28. In his discussion of the 1964–70 Labour government, Anderson not only ignores Mintech but gives the impression that the Labour government's industrial policy initiatives were over by 1967. Anderson, pp. 60–63.

proportion of total British R&D expenditures going to defence, and the proportion of defence expenditure devoted to defence R&D.

### The Arms Boom of the 1970s and 1980s

By 1969, however, there was a change. Defence R&D was set to increase, simultaneously with the decision to pull out from East of Suez.<sup>81</sup> Defence R&D grew through the 1970s, as such massive projects as Tornado (a joint European venture), Chevaline, the Nimrod early-warning aircraft and much else were started. This growth in defence R&D in the 1970s also took place in France (though not in the USA or Germany). Overall, Britain remained the second largest spender in absolute terms on defence R&D in the capitalist world. In relative terms, the commitment to defence R&D was staggering. Of the major capitalist powers in the 1970s, Britain spent the highest proportion of total national R&D spending (approximately 28 per cent), and between 1976 and 1981 the highest proportion of government R&D spending (over 50 per cent), on defence. This high level of defence R&D was not simply a consequence of high defence spending. The proportion of defence spending going to R&D was the highest in the capitalist world.<sup>82</sup>

As is better known, through the 1970s and 1980s, with the exception of the USA, Britain spent a higher proportion of GDP on defence than any other major capitalist nation. The proportion had decreased to 4.4 per cent by 1979, but was raised by rearmament and reduced growth in GDP to 5.1 per cent in 1985. France devoted 4 per cent of GDP to defence in 1985, Germany 3.2 per cent.<sup>83</sup> According to one calculation, British procurement of major weapons was in absolute terms the largest in Europe in the 1980s.<sup>84</sup> In the early 1980s, procurement expenditures increased in real terms. This was a period in which manufacturing output collapsed and recovered only slowly. The net result was the increased militarization of British manufacturing, already the most militarized in Europe. The main reason for this was domestic procurement, but it is worth noting that armament exports increased more rapidly than civil exports. Indeed, in the 1980s Britain remained a major *net* exporter of armaments, but became a *net* importer of manufactures.<sup>85</sup> If we take aerospace (military and civil) we find that since 1970 the British aerospace industry has maintained its 13 per cent share of world markets, while

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<sup>81</sup> In January 1969 Richard Crossman noted. 'All our election commitments were to reorientate the whole balance of R&D away from defence to civil affairs. We haven't done it. Instead, Denis [Healey—Minister of Defence] has managed to say that if we are to make major cuts in overseas military commitments we must maintain a predominant position for R&D, and have the best even for our limited, new, European-based defences. If our equipment is reduced it must, he maintains, be of the best and if we are to buy British it means that the R&D can't be cut back in proportion to the cut in our foreign commitments.' Crossman, *Diaries* Volume III, p. 309.

<sup>82</sup> Council for Science and Society, *UK Military R&D*, Oxford 1986, Figs. 2.1, 2.6, 2.7.

<sup>83</sup> *SIPRI Yearbook* 1990, Oxford 1990, p. 196

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>85</sup> T. Taylor and K. Hayward, *The Defence Industrial Base*, London 1989, Table 2.II.



manufacturing's share decreased from around 11 per cent to about 7 per cent in the mid 1980s.<sup>86</sup>

In terms of the procurement organization, we have noted that a Procurement Executive was established in the Ministry of Defence by Edward Heath in the early 1970s. Henceforth defence procurement was institutionally separate from wider industrial policy, and would remain so. Even so, the arms sector had a somewhat unusual history in the 1970s and 1980s. Rolls-Royce and Ferranti were both nationalized in the early 1970s to save them from bankruptcy. In the late 1970s both aircraft and shipbuilding were nationalized, in part because of their importance to defence. A single major aircraft manufacturer, British Aerospace, was created, and it was one of the very first firms to be privatized by the Thatcher government. Indeed, by the end of the 1980s practically the whole arms-production sector was in private hands, for the first time: British Shipbuilders' warship yards were privatized piecemeal, as was the ROF tank factory. Other privatizations were Rolls-Royce, Royal Ordnance, Ferranti, and the management of the Royal Dockyards. Many of these privatizations were direct deals with firms rather than stock-exchange flotations. All these companies remained dependent on defence contracts, and British Aerospace in particular was to receive generous back-door subsidies. British Aerospace, which bought Royal Ordnance and the only British car firm, Rover Group, established itself firmly as the seventh largest arms producer in the world, and the largest in Europe.<sup>87</sup> Britain thus entered the 1990s with the largest and strongest military-industrial-scientific complex in Western Europe—a complex that retained its strength while other parts of the British economy and society fell apart.

If the British state became an increasingly military-industrial state, it also became an increasingly militant state. Of course postwar British troops played an important role in imperial policing: in Malaya, Korea, Kenya, Cyprus, Suez, Aden and so on. But that phase was over by the late 1960s, or so it appeared, though 'low intensity' operations in Northern Ireland continued. 1982 saw the Falklands War; but the early 1980s were also notable for a general British rearmament, and the extraordinary decision to purchase the Trident missile and build submarines for it. This was a classic piece of more-bang-per-buck liberal militarism, but one isolated from geopolitical and strategic reality to an alarming degree. However, it was the end of the 1980s that saw British world-historical delusions reaching record levels of absurdity. Mrs Thatcher saw the end of the Cold War as a triumph of English militant liberalism: the Declaration of the Rights of Man became a minor variant of the Magna Carta; the Bolshevik Revolution a mere coup d'état. One felicitous consequence was that Britain could pull out of the unsavoury 'continental commitment' and pursue

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<sup>86</sup> K. Hayward, *The British Aircraft Industry*, Manchester 1989, Fig. 2, p. 201. Britain remained the fourth largest exporter of arms in the world in the 1980s, after the USA, the USSR and France. In the 1980s the British government put out figures which suggested that Britain had become the third or even second arms exporter, but according to SIPRI these claims did not reflect actual deliveries of arms. See *SIPRI Yearbook 1990*, pp. 221, 225–6.

<sup>87</sup> GBC was fourteenth, Plessey fifty-third. From *SIPRI Yearbook 1990*, p. 326.

a world role once again. The return to East of Suez, even as a subsidiary of the US Marine Corps, came faster than anyone might have expected, but it was anticipated. That was the dismal 'end of history' for English liberalism and English technology.

### Ideological Blinkers?

I have argued that the British state has pursued a very particular defence policy which resulted in the creation of departments of state that did acquire 'the traits of the engineer'. I have shown also that this was recognized within the state. We are left with an important question: why has British liberal militarism, its technological orientation, and its implications for the state not been recognized by historians and commentators on the British state? The first reason is the almost complete neglect of the defence and foreign policies of the British state in available accounts. Thus, for example, commentators as perceptive and as historically inclined as Colin Leys, David Coates and Andrew Gamble barely mention the armed services and foreign policy.<sup>88</sup> More remarkable still is the case of Tom Nairn. In his excellent recent study of the British monarchy he argued strongly that modernity, despite the assurances of ideologues, is not yet with us: we should therefore take seriously what appear to be merely remnants of pre-modern formations. Nevertheless, he too ignores the armed services of the Crown.<sup>89</sup> Having said this, Nairn's general argument certainly applies in the case of the armed services. Liberals and social democrats see war and the military as remnants of aristocratic 'militant' societies. Marxists consider armed forces to be instruments of domestic and imperial repression, or as a form of expenditure functional to the capitalist mode of production. There are thus good ideological blinkers standing in the way of a realistic analysis of the role of armed forces in the modern world.<sup>90</sup> In the case of the historiography of twentieth-century Britain, the military are seen as backward while war is broadly seen as progressive because it promotes collectivism and an active role for the state. Modern 'total' war is thought to represent a civil form of warfare rather than a militarization of society.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Colin Leys, *Politics in Britain: An Introduction*, London 1983, David Coates, *The Context of British Politics*, London 1984; David Coates et al., *A Socialist Anatomy of Britain*, London 1985; Andrew Gamble, *Britain in Decline*, London 1981.

<sup>89</sup> Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and Its Monarchy*, London 1988.

<sup>90</sup> D.E.H. Edgerton, 'Science and War', in R.C. Olby et al., *A Companion to the History of Modern Science*, London 1990, and 'The Relationship between Military and Civil Technologies: A Historical Perspective', in P.J. Gummert and J. Reppy, eds., *The Relations between Defence and Civil Technologies*, Dordrecht 1988.

<sup>91</sup> However, we can interpret both world wars somewhat differently. The First World War can be seen as realizing Unionist rather than social-democratic predictions. In a remarkable passage in his history of the Conservative Party, Lord Blake has written: 'There is no need to say much about war politics despite their fascinating dramas and intrigues, because for the purposes of this account of the changing fortunes of a political party, what happened can be stated fairly simply. On almost every issue that came up Conservative tradition and ideology was better suited than Liberal to meet the needs of the hour. Conscription, "defence of the realm", Ireland, indeed all the necessities of a prolonged war, tended to create doubts and divisions in the Liberals. After all they were the party of liberty, and liberty is the first casualty of war. They were the party of moral conscience—and that is another casualty of war. They were the party of legalism, parliamentary forms, constitutional propriety—and these also are casualties

The characteristic contributions of socialist historians to twentieth-century British historiography has been in the fields of economic, social and labour history, a historiographical replication (to put it very crudely) of the division of enthusiasms and responsibilities at the level of politics and the state: the Right takes care of defence and foreign policy; the Left of social and labour policy. This is despite the importance of peace movements in twentieth-century Britain, in the Edwardian years, the early 1930s, the late 1950s, and the 1980s. These peace movements produced a vast amount of literature, but remarkably little on the actual war-fighting strategies of the British state. The Edwardian literature concentrated on the irrationality of war in the modern world; the 1930s literature on the private manufacturers of arms (the 'Merchants of Death'); the 1950s literature on the immorality of the hydrogen bomb. As James Hinton has shown, these peace movements never really examined the role of the British state in the world system; they were concerned to remove what they saw as the impediments to the British state pursuing its true role—that of peace-maker. Hinton resorted to seeming oxymorons to categorize the position of the British peace movements: 'imperialist pacifism' and 'socialist nationalism'.<sup>92</sup> Hinton himself did not examine the ideology of those to whom the peace movements were opposed.<sup>93</sup> Here too I believe we need to resort to the seeming oxymorons: 'liberal militarism' and, perhaps, 'reactionary modernism'. The military-industrial complex, of course, comprised a vital prop of such ideologies.

### Models of the State

Why has the Right not provided a political and historiographical analysis of British liberal militarism? One answer is that to some extent it has, but analyses are usually restricted to particular periods and particular institutions. In general treatments of Britain and war, the Right in effect blames Britain's lack of military preparedness on liberalism and imperialism. It is significant that this interpretation has come from *military* (rather than naval or air) historians. For the military historians, the touchstone of commitment to military force, and a 'realistic' view of the world, is the commitment of a significant

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<sup>92</sup> (cont.)

of war. Then there was sheer pacifism and its watered down version—belief in the evil of war and of any British government that waged it. True, the pro-Boers had no analogy. There were no Liberal pro-Germans. But the scruples, doubts, misgivings were there. It was the Conservatives who before the war had been anti-German, who had pressed for conscription, for greater armaments, for a tougher foreign policy, for the French and later the Russian alliance. R. Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*, London 1985, p. 196. Can we see the Second World War in similar terms? There are of course obvious differences: in the political complexion of the war, and in the fact that Labour reaped the electoral advantage. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember that Conservative foreign and defence policy assumptions were strengthened. See Anthony Barnett, 'Iron Britannia', John Saville, 'Ernest Bevin and the Cold War 1945–1950', *Socialist Register* 1984, London 1984, pp. 68–100. On Ernest Bevin's death, *The Times* noted that 'Like Mr Churchill, he seemed a visitor from the 18th century.' Quoted in Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin. Foreign Secretary 1945–1951*, London 1985, p. 856.

<sup>93</sup> James Hinton, *Protests and Visions*, London 1989.

<sup>94</sup> Martin Ceadel, in his book on the different ways in which war is discussed by different ideologies, has very little to say on British 'militaristic' ideologies. See *Thinking about War and Peace*, Oxford 1986.

British *Army* to the Continent.<sup>94</sup> Generally speaking, military historians have been more concerned with strategy than with the scientific and industrial side of British warfighting. The major exception is Correlli Barnett, an extreme Continental-commitment ideologue. His *Audit of War* stands out as the most comprehensive analysis of strategy, ideology and scientific and industrial performance to be written.<sup>95</sup> Barnett is a nationalist and militarist. I do not mean this pejoratively; the militaristic perspective on modern history has much to commend it as a way of understanding the real world, as Michael Mann and others have recently argued.<sup>96</sup> Barnett argues that to audit a nation at war is to audit the nation itself; to audit its military technology is to audit all its technology. This central proposition is of course open to challenge, but the important point for our purposes is that Barnett does not distinguish between the military and civil sectors of British industry, and the very different state policies for each.

Barnett's book has been very well received, across the political spectrum, despite his espousal of what on the face of it seems a very unBritish ideology, one which Paul Addison has described as 'Bismarckian nationalism'.<sup>97</sup> Could it be that the technocratic-militaristic-nationalistic tradition is in fact much stronger in Britain than has been made out? I believe that it is, as may be shown by the fact that Germany and Japan are routinely taken as exemplars of what modern nations should be like.<sup>98</sup>

Perry Anderson, for example, assumes that a German-style state is the key to industrial success.<sup>99</sup> The British and American states were incapable of 'checking or reversing the laws of uneven development, once the play of comparative advantage turns against it... The Federal State is still less equipped, by tradition or vocation, for purposive reindustrialization than its unitary British opposite.'<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, the United States rose through tariffs, the New Deal, and the Second World War<sup>101</sup>—state measures (even though conscript militarism, state-created infrastructures, and state education were absent in the United States). The Other Country lurking here is surely Imperial Germany, which has the three-fold 'presences', and 'where the summits of capital were uncompromisingly industrial, commanded by the Ruhr giants Krupp, Thyssen and Stinnes. It was the absence of

<sup>94</sup> See Hew Strachan, 'The British Way in Warfare Revisited', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 26, 1983, pp. 447–61.

<sup>95</sup> I have criticized this book and its reviewers in 'The Prophet Militant and Industrial: The Peculiarities of Correlli Barnett', in Richard Aldrich et al., eds., *Proceedings of the 1990 ICBH Conference*, forthcoming.

<sup>96</sup> Michael Mann, 'The Roots and Contradictions of Modern Militarism', *NLJ* 162, March–April 1987. See also Anthony Giddens, *The Nation State and Violence*, London 1985; C. Creighton and M. Shaw, eds., *The Sociology of War and Peace*, London 1987; M. Shaw, *The Dialectics of War*, London 1988.

<sup>97</sup> Addison also noted the 'teutonic feel of the book' *London Review of Books*, 24 July 1986.

<sup>98</sup> A particularly clear example is afforded by Chris Freeman's recent *Technology Policy and Economic Performance*, London 1987.

<sup>99</sup> See Anderson, pp. 47–8 for a comparison of state structures, over more than one hundred years, of the principal industrial states, which is not correlated to industrial performance. See also pp. 73–7. The Soviet case is inexplicably missing.

<sup>100</sup> Anderson, p. 76.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 46, 76.

figures like these which characterized the Victorian economy.'<sup>102</sup> Elsewhere, however, Anderson implicitly denies the modernizing power of the Wilhelmine State.<sup>103</sup>

Anderson, Barnett, and others, are very critical of the British state in ways that are often misleading. But as criticism of British *political culture*, their arguments are often justified. It is too easy to assume that a deficient political culture is indicative of a deficient administrative or state culture. Recent historical work by Peter Gowan and Keith Middlemas suggests very powerfully that the separation of what might be called 'political culture' from 'state culture' is central to the understanding of the British state since the late nineteenth century.<sup>104</sup> British militarism, and by extension the history of state support for science, technology and industry, provides a good case. Liberal militarism was in part designed to keep defence policy out of politics, to give the state freedom to use its armed forces, and in that it has succeeded remarkably well. The realities were obscured even from some of the bitterest critics of the state, who have influentially advanced the analysis of an anti-industrial and anti-scientific British state. British grown-ups preferred not to discuss this kind of thing in front of the children.

As Britain goes to war again, on a scale perhaps surpassing Suez, the failure to understand that through the twentieth century the British state has been both militant and industrial has clear political consequences. The first is that the Labour Party has once again succumbed to the 'remember Munich' syndrome: the belief that Britain is inherently a pacifist nation that keeps its limited forces on short rations until it is too late. The second is that it fails to see that the militant-industrial British state may be creating a new role for itself in the post-Cold War years. For it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that one of the many causes of the present disastrous war was the desire of the American and British warfare states, and their individual armed services, to secure themselves a future. Operation 'Desert Shield' has been aptly called Operation 'Budget Shield'. This present war reveals the British state as the most militaristic in Europe; it is not unreasonable to conclude that the British have become the high-tech Gurkhas of the Western world—a sad fate for a peace-loving, anti-scientific, and imperial race.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 35. A more apposite comparison might have been with the German chemical firms, for example, BASF, AGFA, Bayer, Hoechst, and electrical firms like AEG and Siemens, rather than with steel makers. Also curious is the distinctly un-Marxist emphasis on the individual wealth of single entrepreneurs in his comparisons between Britain, Germany and the United States. Surely what is significant is the total wealth of industrial capitalists as a whole, not the distribution of wealth amongst them, unless this is directly correlated to the development of large firms with efficient managerial structures, which is not necessarily the case.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>104</sup> Peter Gowan, 'The Origins of the Administrative Elite', *NLR* 162, March–April 1987; Keith Middlemas, *The Politics of the Industrial Society*, London 1979.

## Economies Out of Control

At the end of the 1980s a word was pronounced in London and New York which had virtually dropped out of economic vocabulary at the start of the decade—*stagflation*. The Reagan and Thatcher booms are over and their successors have been left to grapple with a legacy of financial disorder and industrial decay. War in the Gulf, apart from all its other dangers, will entail heavy economic costs for both the United States and Britain. Even without the Gulf crisis, however, economic developments have been increasingly adverse: by the beginning of this year both the US and the British economies were in recession, in spite of rising inflation rates, and a familiar policy dilemma was posed once again—either a degree of price stabilization at the cost of deeper recession or some growth at the cost of increasingly immoderate doses of credit expansion.

Of course, such dilemmas unfailingly recur. Concrete economic processes are always cyclical. Stabilization or equilibration mean in practice that a cyclical pattern has become more 'virtuous'—the same policy trade-offs recur but in a less acute, more manageable form. It is doubtful, however, whether the macroeconomic conjuncture today is more favourable than ten or twelve years ago. On the one hand, inflation is less likely to accelerate: the weakening of trade unions has deprived most wage-earners of prompt and full compensation for price increases, and the deterioration of social-security systems has compromised the indexation of welfare payments. As a result the macroeconomy is probably more stable in the face of inflationary shocks, which take longer to propagate and are less likely to develop a cumulative effect. On the other hand, the policy-makers' armoury is depleted by the absence of a key weapon—the big crunch. It is now almost inconceivable that the US economy would be subjected to a repeat of the Volcker shock of 1980, since neither the fragile financial system nor a precarious productive structure could withstand the blow. The same is even more true in the field of international economic relations, which have still not fully recovered from the disruption of trade and investment flows provoked by the US credit squeeze of ten years ago. Thus, if the economy is somewhat more robust in the face of upward, inflationary disturbances, it is more vulnerable to sudden or intense contractionary pressures. The overall constraints on policy have probably tightened.

It will be suggested here that the re-emergence, on both sides of the Atlantic, of stagflationary phenomena, in a modified but no less virulent form, represents the failure of neoliberal strategies to overcome the barriers to sustained economic development; and that the economic history of the last decade, sometimes interpreted as a rupture with the previous economic model, is more accurately seen as a cycle within that model, although the cycle was admittedly of a particularly violent and disruptive character. However, it is not claimed that neoliberal strategies have had little effect; on the contrary, there have been profound effects on every aspect of social life. Neither is there any attempt to deny the multiple adaptations of economic agents—enterprises, households, governments—to changed economic circumstances. The argument here is much more circumscribed: what is being rejected is the hypothesis of a new regime of accumulation, that is, of a reorganized productive system endowed with appropriate regulatory structures, which is capable of sustained and consistent development. Continuing monetary disorders are at the same time an expression of this lack of reorganization and an additional source of instability and uncertainty in economic life. Currently the sphere of monetary and financial relations displays a persistent build-up of inflationary pressures. Although the partial and delayed indexation of popular incomes continues to mitigate the effect of these pressures on the general price level, their inexorable result in the medium term is increasing rates of open price inflation. Rates of inflation have been rising in OECD countries since 1986. Since 1987 inflation in the USA has been higher than the average rate for Western Europe; in Britain rates have been above average since 1985. Policy-makers have no convincing response: on the one hand, Western economies will not bear another round of monetary 'disinflation' on the Volcker pattern; on the other hand, the thoroughgoing reform of productive structures needed to drive down social costs, to restore balance among sectors, and to expand the value of goods and services produced, still lies beyond the horizon of existing strategies.

One implication of this view is that the field of possible political and economic initiatives is more open than might be supposed. Western societies are not faced with a successful 'settlement',<sup>1</sup> analogous to that of the postwar years, which narrowly defines a particular path of social advance and closes off competing institutional arrangements. Even the central institutional result of the neoliberal programmes, namely the restored social legitimacy of the enterprise, is more ambivalent and less definitive than it might appear. The coming inflation does not mean catastrophe, but it does imply the persistence of serious and uncontrolled economic dysfunctions which will continue to invite attempts at radical reform.

### Money and Regulation

A relatively unrecognized achievement of the Regulation School has been its integration of an account of monetary phenomena into the

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<sup>1</sup> See Andrew Glyn et al., 'The Rise and Fall of the Golden Age', in S. Marglin and J. Schor, eds., *The Golden Age of Capitalism*, Oxford 1990.

general framework provided by the notion of a regime of accumulation.<sup>2</sup> The main features of this account will be recalled here as a basis for an assessment of recent monetary policy. In a sense the Regulationist literature tries to synthesize Marxist and Keynesian monetary concepts. The common element of the two traditions is a rejection of *dualism*, of the hypostatized dichotomy of real and monetary relations that survives within the increasingly baroque constructions of economic orthodoxy.

The starting point for Lipietz and Aglietta<sup>3</sup> is Marx's interpretation of the function of money as a general equivalent. Monetary exchange is the point at which private productive activities receive social recognition or *validation*. The monetary constraint—that is, basically, the requirement on producers to realize the money value of their products—thus enacts the social ratification of otherwise separate and incommensurable production processes. There are not *two* constraints in business practice, as is implied by theories which give a false concreteness to the necessary distinction between real and nominal values: agents do not have to meet a real exchange constraint. Rather, the real constraint only operates to the extent that it finds effective monetary expression. Already a first general conclusion can be drawn on the relation between stability and the coherence of an established and well-functioning regime of accumulation. Monetary stability certainly requires specific institutions, but its first necessary condition is the proportionality of productive activities that enables each economic agent to meet monetary constraints via the realization of commodities produced.

It is necessary, however, to avoid attributing an exaggerated, deterministic, objectivity to monetary constraints. The role of credit in investment must be taken into account. Although Marx certainly explored the credit system, the Keynesian theory of liquidity preference is indispensable for a full account of credit relations. By means of credit, the agents of a capitalist economy can provide their own means of exchange and thus shift the direct constraint of realization or suspend its operation. Monetary constraints can now be met in two ways: either by the sale of output or by the issue of debt. The second possibility largely rests on social convention, on the existence or otherwise of a widely accepted view of current social and economic developments, which stabilizes the valuation of capital assets and limits the perceived risks of holding credit instruments secured on them. It is essentially shared, social, assessments of value which persuade economic units with surpluses to recycle monetary resources to deficit units and thus maintain the cohesion of exchange relations as a whole. As Aglietta emphasizes, the time horizon itself, over which enterprises and other agents can calculate, turns out to be an endogenous aspect of these credit relations: when expectations concerning future system-wide developments are stable and widely shared, then a wide spectrum of private liabilities will be regarded as liquid and will find a place in the portfolios of those units whose current operations generate a surplus of

<sup>2</sup> For a survey, see Bob Jessop, 'Regulation Theories in Retrospect and Prospect', *Economy and Society*, May 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Alain Lipietz, *The Enchanted World*, London 1983; M. Aglietta and A. Orléan, *La violence de la monnaie*, Paris 1982.



revenues over expenditures. Once again there is a close relationship between a well-functioning regime of accumulation and the fluidity of monetary mechanisms, but in this case the role of conventions—that is, relatively stable intersubjective representations of economic life—receives particular emphasis. (The abundant international credit available to Britain and the USA in the mid eighties did not mean that these countries had overcome the main barriers to sustained growth, but merely that they were widely believed to have done so.)

The Regulationists complete their account of monetary systems with a discussion of the role of central banks. In modern economic systems, where credit money has completely displaced commodity money, the overall management of credit relations is assigned to an institution. There is a hierarchy of private credit where the liabilities of higher units (the money issued by commercial banks for example) command readier and more widespread acceptance than those of units lower down whose access to credit they can thus control. At the top of the pyramid the central bank guarantees the equivalence of the various privately issued moneys by its influence on the constraints faced by commercial banks. The key policy choices of the banking system as a whole are whether, and under what conditions, to refinance deficit units. In Lipietz's account the banking system shifts direct—realization—constraints, and thus stabilizes the formation of social income in monetary form: individual enterprises *prevalidate* their own output by money payments to workers and proprietors; their ability to do so is constrained by commercial banks and other financial institutions which extend credit to them and thus *antiv*alidate their output; in case of an eventual failure to sell the output at the pre-established price and thus clear the debts incurred, the central bank can refinance the agents involved and thus *pseudo*validate their basically unsuccessful projects.

The context of monetary policy is determined by the regime of accumulation as a whole. Under optimal conditions stability is assured both by the general match between supply and demand and by the confidence of economic agents that this will continue. When, however, the coherence of the regime is disturbed, and when this disturbance is seen as undermining conventional asset values, the monetary authorities are forced to make critical strategic choices. On the one hand, the widespread refinance of illiquid deficit units can be encouraged in order to prevent the fragmentation of the network of exchange relations; but this will provoke inflation to the extent that restructuring by debtors does not succeed in eliminating imbalances between cost and demand. This is a centralizing strategy which carries the risk that initial imbalances may persist and even widen. On the other hand, a decentralizing, deflationary strategy—refusing or strictly curtailing refinance—although it will compel a rapid adjustment of deficit positions, may prove too difficult for individual agents, and then the elimination of loss-making units will threaten a cumulative breakdown of existing relations. Such strategic choices, moreover, are not taken in a vacuum but under the pressure of interest groups whose own allegiances shift and recombine with the changing conjuncture. Given the successful reproduction of an established regime of accumulation, creditors and debtors will be bound together by a solidarity

that rests on an agreed valuation of financial instruments. But when the regime can no longer orient investment activity towards a conventionally accepted future for the system, this solidarity is disturbed. Nevertheless a collapse is not inevitable—debtors will pressure banks and monetary authorities to shield them from creditors; but the latter, although now anxious for rapid repayment or transfers of ownership, may hold back from foreclosure through the fear of failures that will devalorize their assets. The structures of intermediation, which determine the possibility of aggregating debtor or creditor interests, clearly play a key role in the development of these relations. Essentially the central bank now has to choose between antagonistic and incompatible restructuring projects, formulated by groups of agents who no longer share a common vision of the broad trends in the system as a whole, nor agree on the time horizon appropriate for individual investments and reconstructions.

Such are some of the main themes of Regulationist monetary theory. It is not claimed that the general conclusions are in any way exclusive to the Regulation School: similar results are presented by other tendencies in economic thought, notably the post-Keynesians.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless the School has developed a well-articulated account of monetary phenomena and their interconnection with economic processes in general. It is a useful standpoint from which to consider the monetary strategies of neoliberalism.

### The Turn to Inflation

If one accepts mainstream accounts of economic policy, the eighties were a period of 'disinflation'—a general and consistent return to price stability which only encountered certain structural limits at the very end of the decade. The slowdown in general price rises, considered in isolation, seems to justify this view of events. The argument outlined above, however, suggests quite a different interpretation. Both in Britain and, much more significantly, in the USA, sustained efforts at monetary stabilization were abandoned at a very early date in favour of growth-oriented policies based on continuous and increasingly inflationary credit expansions. The resulting increases in the general price level of goods and services, though so far less rapid than during the cost-inflation of the seventies, seem highly likely to accelerate. This failure to restore genuine price stability is symptomatic of central weaknesses in neoliberal economic strategies and an almost utopian lack of realism in the premisses on which they rest. It is the same weaknesses that prevent these strategies from laying the foundations for a new long-term growth model able to orient individual behaviour and sustain a high level of investment.

The severe monetary restriction pursued in both Britain and the USA between 1979/80 and 1982 can be seen as a decentralization strategy. The central instances of monetary control (large commercial banks together with the central bank) no longer sheltered deficit units from the pressure of their creditors, whether by low real rates of interest (in

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<sup>4</sup> Particularly relevant is the work of H. Minsky, for example, *Inflation, Recessions and Economic Policy*, Brighton 1982.

the seventies often, in fact, negative) or by the refinance of insolvent positions. The consequences were in complete accord with the general neoliberal project: responsibility for adjustment and restructuring was thrust onto individual enterprises; while the sanction for failure was exercised by other private agents—customers, suppliers, creditors in general. At the same time, the contraction of credit and tightening liquidity constraints imposed a sharp and more immediate need for overall economic coherence, so that the alternative of market validation or competitive elimination had to be faced within much shorter time periods.

Since the world is still living through the aftermath of this ('Volcker') shock, and through the transformations it initiated, an insistence that this was a very brief and atypical episode might seem perverse. One could explore at length, for example, the ideological impact of the restrictive policy and the dramatic repudiation of social responsibility it implied. Nevertheless, as a well defined and consistent strategy, monetary disinflation was essentially abandoned at the beginning of the eighties.

The British experiment obviously did not have the global repercussions of the US one, but is discussed here separately because it was autonomous: most countries were constrained to tighten their monetary policies after US interest rates rose,<sup>3</sup> but the majority of OECD economies avoided a sharp contraction of credit by maintaining relatively centralized refinance strategies; only Mrs Thatcher's administration anticipated events by beginning a severe squeeze before the USA. In Britain, however, the retreat from monetary rigour began almost as soon as it was introduced. A systematic rescue of industrial enterprises with 'cash-flow problems', carried out by the commercial banks but certainly welcome to the Bank of England, was launched almost as soon as the scale of dislocation was realized. Very soon policy makers started to explore the possibilities of a strange and paradoxical conjuncture: a very high exchange rate practically divorced incomes in Britain from depressed levels of domestic production; while the financial status of the City of London had been considerably enhanced by high interest rates, by the removal of exchange controls, and by the prestige accorded by international wealth holders to a government prepared to induce mass unemployment; finally, despite the exchange rate, the recession had produced a current-account surplus large enough to suspend the perennial external constraint on British expansion. There began the long boom of the Lawson period...

In the USA, restriction lasted for over two years. The decisive turn in central-bank policy seems to have come in the summer of 1982, in reaction to the huge scale and global extent of impending financial failures. These included important US interests, in particular the savings banks, which were victims of high interest rates, as well as international debtors in Latin America and elsewhere. In both cases the centralized organization of minimal refinance has continued for a decade without beginning to resolve the underlying problems. For

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<sup>3</sup> US interest rates also had a directly deflationary effect on Europe; see J.-P. Fitoussi and E. Phelps, *The Slump in Europe*, Oxford 1988.

developing countries in particular, the eighties were a lost decade: primary product prices never fully recovered from the recession, while unpaid and unpayable foreign debt blocked internal expansion. As in Britain, the substantive change in monetary policy was to some extent obscured by the multiple technical adjustments necessitated by the simplistic 'quantitative' doctrines used to justify restriction. At this point, however, monetary policy no longer presented a major obstacle to the expansionist supply-side programme of the executive, and Reaganomics could take off. As in Britain, an uncompetitive exchange rate weakened the link between domestic production and consumption, which could thus offer an early political payoff to the administration. The boom, eventually preserved by an even larger depreciation, was the longest in peacetime US history.

At one level the U-turns in monetary policy can be attributed to an inherent conflict between the two traditional roles of the central bank: on the one hand, guardian of the currency; on the other, lender of last resort.<sup>6</sup> The attempt to squeeze inflation out of the economy by a drastic tightening of monetary constraints implied a readiness to curtail this second function. But when put to the test, central banks found the costs of such a sacrifice—in terms of recession and instability—too high to pay. Hence the policy stance was reversed, as discretely as possible, and the largest and most influential victims of the foregoing restriction were refinanced.

Although this policy dilemma certainly arose, in itself it does not provide a full explanation for the U-turn, especially since it involved surrendering a key component of the neoliberal agenda. After all, there are instances of successful monetary stabilization (for example, West Germany in 1948) which has stopped even hyperinflations dead by cutting off the flow of central-bank money. And even in the eighties most OECD countries, in response to the rise in US interest rates, managed to achieve more rapid and more lasting disinflation than the two countries which initiated the monetarist experiment.

The fundamental problem with monetarist tactics in Britain and the USA was that they neglected the social dimension of economic adjustment. The persistent decline of industrial competitiveness in both countries may in part be due to inadequate social integration: without dense and robust social interconnections among economic agents, and without wide areas of perceived common interest, industrial coordination has not been rapid or effective enough to sustain development. However, if it was the lack of social cohesion that exposed the economy to industrial malaise, the same weakness meant that monetary restriction would not be an appropriate treatment. The task of rapid and thorough economic adjustment could not be effectively decentralized, because the decentralized agents were not linked by a tightly woven fabric of associations and interrelationships. To consider a pertinent example, one of the big losers from monetary restriction in the USA was farming, struck by the double blow of very high interest rates and exchange rates which compromised international competitiveness. The avoidance of an even greater number of farm bankruptcies was a

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<sup>6</sup> For a classic statement, see R. Hawtrey, *The Art of Central Banking*, London 1932.

major motive for the relaxation of monetary policy in 1982. Now one can envisage economies where the close interlocking of agricultural and industrial interests would have permitted the adaptation and renegotiation of farm output and income in the face of monetary pressure. The narrowly contractual relations that prevailed in the USA did not have this degree of flexibility and, even with lower interest rates, extensive government intervention was needed to restore a minimum of stability. Economic responsibility cannot be simply transferred from central agencies to individual units in the way imagined by Western neoliberals yesterday and their East European imitators today. What is conceivable is a transfer from state to *civil society*, but on condition that the latter exists in a more elaborate form than an assembly of individuals and enterprises linked only by market and purely contractual relations. Therein lies the basically utopian nature of the neoliberal programme: in order to reduce in a genuine way the scope of state agencies, and to enhance the responsibility of decentralized decision-makers, it would have been necessary to ~~increase~~ government intervention in support of initially deficient associative structures. What actually happened was the reverse of this: enormous scope was created for individual profit maximization—by means of tax cuts, deregulation, privatization and so on—but the decentralization of decision-making was essentially irresponsible, since the overall cohesion of economic activities became increasingly the centralized function of the monetary authorities.

### The Boom

By 1983 the two Western countries that had most seriously experimented with monetarist disinflation were embarked on massive cyclical booms. Although in both cases the expansion was presented as the fruit of the victory of market disciplines and monetary rigour over the old interventionist laxity, in practice rapid growth involved widening imbalances—most notably in external trade—which were financed by credit creation. If the booms had indeed signalled the emergence of a new growth model, then the disequilibria would not necessarily have had inflationary consequences: the new credit could have taken the form of long-term claims, held with confidence, while sustained development would gradually have increased the ability of enterprises to finance growth out of profits, and would thus have limited their need to incur debt. Such interpretations were in fact put forward. The British balance-of-payments deficit, for example, was interpreted, for a while, as a sign of resurgent industrial investment.<sup>7</sup> In the same way, the speculative, credit-financed, takeover boom on US and British stock markets was presented as evidence of fundamental industrial restructuring. Gradually, however, these optimistic accounts became harder to justify. In the British case, the external constraint on growth reappeared in the late eighties as the clearest possible indication that the basic problems of industrial decline had not been overcome. The balance of payments does not have the same significance in the USA, since it is covered by dollar-denominated debt, but in the USA too there was increasing

<sup>7</sup> Recently the fashionable insouciance with which many British economists viewed the balance of payments has started to dissolve. See J. Muelbauer and A. Murphy, 'Is the UK Balance of Payments Sustainable', *Economic Policy*, October 1990, and the *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, Autumn 1990 (special issue on the balance of payments)

concern with problems of industrial competitiveness, linked to social and institutional conditions, such as low educational standards, which the neoliberal reform programme did not in any way address.<sup>8</sup>

Credit expansion also permitted an increase in internal disequilibria. One factor linking external and internal indebtedness was a virtual collapse of personal saving in both countries. Standard economic analysis has had some difficulty in accounting for this phenomenon: deregulation of finance was one factor, but it may also be linked to the continuing absence of new consumption norms which would orient and stabilize household expenditure patterns. Corporate debt has also grown rapidly. An early consequence of neoliberal reforms was to reverse the previous decline in company profitability, but this was a result of tax cuts and pressure on wages rather than the opening of new markets or the pursuit of new technical trajectories. Thus the restoration of company balance sheets proved somewhat fragile and exposed to any new recession. Investment in both countries remained at relatively low levels, while the rapid growth of finance, real estate, and some other business service sectors came to seem unbalanced and unsustainable.

Political opportunism certainly determined this shift from monetary rigour to credit expansion. The second electoral victory of Mrs Thatcher in 1983 would have been difficult without the sharp reduction in interest rates which took place the year before and stimulated a rapid growth of income. In the USA the attempt at disinflation was essentially the work of the central bank under Volcker, and the political cost was paid by Jimmy Carter and the Democrats. Ronald Reagan took advantage of lower inflation and a stronger dollar to cut taxes and launch expansion as soon as he took office in 1983.

The inflationary nature of the US and British recoveries went unrecognized for some time, because observers were still grappling with the previous episode of genuine monetary restriction and because the empirical characteristics of inflation were very different from those experienced in the sixties and seventies. As has been pointed out, the indexation of many incomes was slow and incomplete, and this slowed down the translation of money and credit expansions into rising price indices. For some years also, overvalued exchange rates mitigated the pressure on costs or directed it towards other countries. The eclipse of OPEC, another consequence of the Volcker shock, worked in the same direction, although by the end of the eighties inflation was again threatening an escalation of energy prices. Another important difference was that the expropriation of creditors by the devaluation of nominal assets, which had provided an important degree of freedom in the Fordist/Keynesian growth process of the sixties, did not occur on the same scale: real interest rates remained high throughout the decade, and virtually the entire money stock became interest-bearing as a result of financial deregulation. Thus the distributional mechanisms of the eighties inflation were very different from those of the seventies, and in some ways the opposite of them. Nevertheless, not all creditors enjoyed the same degree of protection. The dollar and

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, R.D. Lam, 'Crises: The Uncompetitive Society', in M. Scarr, ed., *Global Competitiveness*, New York 1988.

sterling depreciations of the late eighties effectively cancelled large amounts of international debt, while US monetary policy was gradually relaxed to produce real interest rates little higher than those of the seventies.<sup>9</sup> In both countries fiscal policy absorbed much of the pressure of interest rates on domestic debtors who were thus shielded from the supposed 'disinflationary' pressure. Fiscal practice was different in the two cases: in the USA huge Federal deficits were provoked by tax cuts which enabled the transfer of much of the burden of debt service to the state; in Britain tax cuts involved, besides a devaluation of welfare benefits, a very serious squeeze on public-sector investment.<sup>10</sup> In the medium term the huge cumulated Federal debt is a permanent temptation to inflate, while the unavoidable resumption of public spending will also create pressures for inflationary finance. Thus the unprecedentedly high real interest rates of the eighties were not an effective brake on inflationary credit expansion: many debtors were shielded from the full burden of debt service; and the demand for credit, fuelled by multiple and growing economic imbalances, hardly slackened. The expansion of spending power is in fact indicated, in a rough and ready way, by the continuous growth of monetary aggregates, which were briefly fetishized during the period of restriction and then rapidly relegated to a purely technical status.

Other characteristics of inflation reversed previous patterns. In the seventies inflation could run ahead in labour markets, and only subsequently affect asset prices; during the eighties, with profits leading wages, inflation could be focused on asset markets and only gradually spill over into other sectors. Some interpretative problems arise from the fact that the initiative was taken by private agents in expanding the nominal value of debt instruments. In principle a private credit inflation creates a choice for the authorities. Either the value of private debt is sustained by refinancing embarrassed agents—debtors or their immediate creditors—thus monetizing existing debt and making it difficult to enforce adjustment and the absorption of imbalances; or restrictive policies compel a general correction, but at the risk of provoking widespread defaults and a cumulative disruption of productive activity. In practice, the second course has hardly been contemplated, either in Britain or the USA, since 1982. Financial deregulation in principle calls for a decentralization of lenders' risks to balance the more decentralized control of borrowing and lending. But decentralizing strategies are only practicable in robust and cohesive financial systems, where pressure on individual agents does not threaten to fragment and fracture the whole process of intermediation. The response of the US authorities to the stock-market crash of October 1987 seems quite representative: their action amounted to a concerted easing of credit policy by the OECD countries as a whole, since other countries intervened on the foreign exchanges to shield the dollar from possible depreciation as interest rates came down. Although a few examples have been made of the most flagrant violators of financial decorum,

<sup>9</sup> By January 1991 nominal US interest rates were lower than in any other major industrial country, including Japan. In real terms US rates were of course substantially lower than in Japan or Germany because of the higher US inflation rate.

<sup>10</sup> For a debate on the economic consequences of Mrs Thatcher, see *Political Quarterly*, April 1989.

any serious threat to the credit system will be met with resolute monetary expansion; and thus the overall process is basically centralized: at the top of the financial pyramid central banks and governments stand ready to validate the position of any important agent.

In Britain, of course, domestic financial control is difficult because the City of London has become a component of the globalized US financial system. Financial deregulation has multiplied these difficulties. The story in Britain is also one of imbalanced growth sustained by inflationary credit expansion, but the essential situation appears particularly banal. The historic balance-of-payments constraint has re-emerged in a particularly brutal form, after being temporarily suspended by the recession of 1980/81, by the advent of North Sea oil, and by inflows of short-run capital tempted by high interest rates.

Thus both of the monetarist experiments of the early eighties appear, in retrospect, as episodes rather than turning points: in the USA the Volcker shock turns out to be only the latest in a series of indecisive and, eventually, abandoned credit crunches; in Britain the Thatcher experiment, as some cynics predicted even at the time, was merely the latest recurrence of the stop-go cycle.

### Recession

By the end of 1990 both the US and British economies were in serious recession. This was not, like the recession which opened the neoliberal era a decade before, a matter of strategic choice. The present declines, which bring the neoliberal experiment to a close, result rather from the comprehensive failure of its economic strategies. The renewal of productive structures has been slow, distorted by speculation and impeded by the neglect of education and other public-sector functions.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, even the limited development that has been achieved is associated with increasing financial fragility: large numbers of debtors—households and companies—are unable to meet their obligations, while intermediaries have growing difficulties in maintaining the flow of credit and the economic activity it supports. (Household saving ratios in Britain and the USA are among the lowest in the industrialized world; the policies which were to spread private property more widely have in fact loaded their populations with an unprecedented weight of debt. British and US companies also have very high debt ratios, exacerbated by the wave of leveraged buy-outs and the excesses of the junk-bond market, which make their investment programmes particularly sensitive to the current fall in profitability.)

The recessions, most acute in Britain and the USA, put paid to the economic myth of *Euroclerosis*, according to which Western European economies were the victims of excessive state intervention and control. In reality, Japan, West Germany and other continental economies have avoided the extreme disequilibria that characterize the USA, precisely because they supplement market relations with other forms of asso-

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<sup>21</sup> On the central issue of training, the *National Institute Economic Review* has published a series of comparative studies of industrial countries, many of them unfavourable to Britain. See, for example, S. Prais, 'Qualified Manpower in Engineering', *NIER*, February 1989.



ciation and coordination. The advantages of their economic systems, briefly obscured by the conjuncture of the mid eighties, are now winning recognition from economic theory: corporatist wage bargaining, which can achieve more efficient employment outcomes; permanent public support of industrial modernization; articulated inter-firm relations, which limit and direct competition and generate external economies of scale for associated enterprises within an industry; and, particularly relevant here, institutionalized long-term relations between industrial companies and the banks which allow German and Japanese companies to make much more use of external finance than their US or British counterparts, reliant on anarchic, competitive credit markets.<sup>12</sup>

A further turn to inflation seems the most likely policy response both in Britain and the USA, although British policy at present is attempting to re-establish some semblance of monetary control, via the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. Only Britain's tardy adhesion to the ERM last year avoided a collapse of sterling on the foreign exchanges. The external value of the pound is now sustained by the strength of the previously despised interventionist and 'sclerotic' economies of the European Community.

ERM membership, however, does nothing to correct the fundamental weaknesses of Britain's economy. The current-account balance-of-payments deficit was, with great difficulty, reduced from an astonishing 4.4 per cent of GNP in 1989 to the still extremely high figure of 3.5 per cent last year. Forecasts show it continuing to resist treatment by means of domestic recession well into the 1990s. Meanwhile British inflation rates, however measured, are running higher than in most other European countries, further eroding competitiveness.<sup>13</sup>

In the face of this drastic repetition of Britain's persistent problems of industrial failure and competitive decline, the Conservative government has, at least in the first instance, chosen to repeat the restrictive policies which have disastrously failed to correct underlying imbalance ever since the return to gold in 1925. The chosen parity at which sterling was pegged to the French franc, German mark and other ERM currencies locks British enterprises into uncompetitive cost structures. Already the parity has to be defended by interest rates seven points higher than in Germany, four points higher than in France. It is clear that British companies do not have the capacity to restructure and modernize under such circumstances—the decentralizing strategy of monetary restriction is doomed in advance, and perhaps perceived as such by its authors themselves, who have not taken the complementary measures (fiscal retrenchment, credit restriction, sharply tightened wage discipline) that would be necessary to make the exchange-rate policy credible. As has been frequently argued, the traditional policy priority of financial stabilization before industrial reconstruction is not only damaging but self-defeating.<sup>14</sup> Inevitable

<sup>12</sup> For illustrative data, see J. Corbett, 'International Perspectives on Financing', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, Winter 1987.

<sup>13</sup> *National Institute Economic Review*, November 1990, for example.

<sup>14</sup> For a particularly trenchant account, see S. Pollard, *The Wasting of the British Economy*, London 1982.

devaluation will register the continuation of underlying inflationary trends: when losses prove too large and too damaging to be absorbed by companies alone, late and inadequate measures of centralized refinance will attempt to rescue something from the debacle. Current policy in Britain, and the sharply rising unemployment it implies, amply confirms the hypothesis of a return to the old vicious cycle of industrial decline, now under extremely unpropitious circumstances.

A similar reassertion of the old policy cycle can be seen in the United States, but here the policy response to declining output is openly and immediately inflationary. The continuing Federal deficit and reductions in interest rates now make both fiscal and monetary policy easier in the USA than in any other major industrial country, in spite of inflation rates well above those of Japan, Germany and France. Vast programmes of inflationary refinance are in prospect—besides a rescue of the insolvent savings-bank system and an unavoidable bailout of social-security institutions, it is now clear that many commercial banks (including perhaps some of the largest) are in trouble with non-performing loans on real estate and elsewhere. A return to credit restriction in these circumstances is both politically and economically unthinkable, but financial fragility combined with continuing production difficulties will deprive the expansionary monetary and fiscal stance of its full effect; it will be difficult to stimulate debt-laden agents to increase either consumption or investment spending. A steep rise in unemployment is forecast, which will undo most of the reduction of the Reagan era. Again in accordance with tradition, the cost of inflationary refinance will in good measure be transferred to the USA's international creditors via the devaluation of dollar-denominated assets. These have already lost half their deutschmark value since 1985, but the US exchange rate still seems due for a period of benign neglect (unless the central banks of Japan and Western Europe mount costly support operations which themselves tend to spread inflation to their own economies).

It is, perhaps, in a reassertion of creditor interests that can be found one possible challenge to the recurrence of inflationary policy cycles in Britain and the USA. With the recession, the neoliberal project—for economic reconstruction through the decentralized adjustments of industrial agents—reveals its utopian character. Its legacy takes the paradoxical form of passive and inflationary validation of inconsistent and disequilibrated private initiatives. The present 'pragmatic' return to centralizing strategies would, however, only make sense if the refinance of units with current deficits were combined with major interventions to reduce waste, to correct imbalances and to promote investment. Even as extreme forms of neoliberalism are abandoned, prevailing doctrines continue to exclude such measures, leaving only a commitment to the refinance of disequilibria for which neither the state nor the individual will accept responsibility. Rising inflation is the logical outcome.

A key role in introducing the neoliberal era was played by a creditors' revolt which buttressed the ideological assault on Keynesian orthodoxy with an important grouping of interests. Today the main creditors are international, but Japan and Germany have until now absorbed

the shocks of US monetary policy smoothly, while maintaining the distinct regulatory principles of their own economies. It is unlikely that Britain's ERM partners will defend for long the sterling exchange rate without requiring some reciprocal influence over British policy, which will not be allowed to frustrate the integration project as it has done in the past. A serious challenge to US monetary hegemony is a different matter. It would require Japan or Germany to undermine the status of the dollar as a reserve asset. Although both countries have taken large capital losses in recycling their trade surpluses onto US credit markets, such a revolt still seems most improbable.

Nevertheless, this predominance of the social over the economic has implications for any attempt to move beyond the crippled neoliberal experiment. The basic failure of neoliberalism has not been in its suspicion of the state, but rather in its impoverished and reductionist view of civil society. If government intervention on a large scale remains a necessary condition for economic recovery, its main theme will not be the detailed direction of economic initiatives but the reconstruction of the social environment for economic progress: the struggle against social exclusion; the reinforcement of education and communication; the promotion and finance of social objectives against the illusory pursuit of purely individual advantage.

The Gulf war seems likely only to aggravate economic disequilibria in Britain and the United States, with greater severity the longer and more destructive is the conflict. Rapid consumption of budgetary and foreign-exchange resources will only be fractionally covered by the subsidies now being solicited from non-combatant industrial powers. Germany, while offering some subventions to the belligerents, has attempted to disengage its own economy from the resulting disorders by means of a rise in interest rates, which will increase the inflationary cost of war finance. No conceivable outcome to the war will compensate for its costs: on the one hand, there is no shortage of oil and Kuwaiti production is not decisive; on the other, central economic problems faced by the United States and Britain concern their own organization, not the supply of raw materials. It is ironic but not surprising that the two industrial countries least able to control their own economic development should also be those who resort most readily to the use of force in external affairs.

## Annan's Unacknowledged Legislators

Let us now praise, and pity, famous men who did their thankless, almost unacknowledged best for the common weal. Let us begin by parsing 'Our Age', and by considering one instance of its operation as a historical concept and a literary device:

Our Age was to see a reprise of the irrationality which Keynes so detested. In 1945 when the American and British governments were pondering what to do when they occupied Germany, there arrived in Whitehall the plan put forward by Morgenthau, the secretary to the US Treasury. It proposed Germany should be pastoralised and everyone in official and economic life down to the middle executive rank of, say, bank manager, should be expelled from their posts for having supported or connived at Nazism. Among the officials at the British Treasury was Edward Playfair who had been at King's. He saw at once that the proposals which had landed on his desk were like the settlement at Versailles, not only mad but bad. Why should Britain pay vast sums to feed the unemployable population of a deindustrialised and destabilised Germany in order to satisfy a demand, however comprehensible, for revenge? This time the forces of reason prevailed.

Where to commence? Let us admit, first, that this agreeable, free-hand style has a charm of its own and that despite an inclination to cliché ('forces of reason'; 'landed on his desk') it can still resonate successfully in parts. 'Mad and bad', which would have been more to the point if it were 'not only bad but mad', is rendered as it is in order to evoke the shade of Brian Howard out of Lord Byron. And could one have a name more exquisitely apt, for the circumstances, than Playfair of King's?

And yet, and yet. Henry Morgenthau's plan was actually defeated at the Quebec Conference between Churchill and Roosevelt in September 1944. It was defeated, having gained the assent of Churchill (who himself wrote in the word 'pastoral') by the combined opposition of Cordell Hull and Henry Stimson. (Neither in 1944 nor in 1945, nor for many years thereafter, were any serious Washington plans being defeated by British civil servants of any college.) It was in the first instance a plan based on the racial theories of Sir Robert, later Lord, Vansittart, Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, who had

declared that German culture, not National Socialism, was the essential enemy. Vansittart's concept, the adoption of which by the British Social Democracy prompted a protest from Arthur Koestler, was refashioned after the war to make Russia, not Germany, into the natural, ancestral enemy. And yet Vansittart does not once appear in Lord Annan's text,\* despite fitting at only a slight angle into his definition—appropriated from Maurice Bowra—of 'Our Age' as: 'Anyone who came of age and went to the university in the thirty years between 1919, the end of the Great War, and 1949—or, say, 1951, the last year in which those who had served in the armed forces in the Second World War returned to study.' At least, by breaking with custom and by correctly giving the closing year of the Great War as 1919, Bowra and Annan concede the Anglo-American war of intervention in Soviet Russia (an episode which goes otherwise unmentioned in this and most other narratives). But in general the hinge events of recent times, such as the postwar emergence of Germany into what Norman Stone has proudly called '*the* successful modern European state'—and thus, clearly, *the* standing reproach to the British Establishment—are scanted unless they touch on the doings of a certain layer of the educated class. In other words, it must be doubted whether Annan would have dealt even as misleadingly as he has with something as momentous as the Morgenthau plan if it did not allow him to deploy Playfair of King's.

There is also, to conclude our parsing of this randomly selected passage, that suggestive word 'comprehensible' in the penultimate sentence. It is, in its context, a rather weak compromise between the forgivable and the merely understandable: between *comprendre* and *pardonner*. This difficulty will recur.

### Upper and Lower Case

Of course, Annan's text is self-limiting by definition. But it does attempt to use its subject as a prism for the study of politics and society. Which raises the intriguing question: can one have such a thing as collective solipsism? The placing of 'Our Age' at the centre of our age, the actual identification of a group or coterie with an epoch, and the use of the identical term to mean both things at different times, is evidence of a more than Hegelian or Weberian vanity. Clusters of persons within English society have always had protective resort to private vernaculars such as 'PLU' ('People like us') or the more cumbersome NQOCD ('Not quite our class, dear'), but these at least come to acquire, like the last prime minister's 'One of Us', an element of self-satire. Annan's usage of 'Our Age' is more like a concertina than a portmanteau, at once too capacious and too restrictive to serve in the nuanced, sophisticated sense that Bowra presumably desired. On one page, 'Our Age saw hundreds of thousands of people come to exhibitions of abstract art', and on another 'To Our Age Henry Moore was the artist of international fame.' The first statement could be made uncontroversially in the lower case, by any social

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\* Noel Annan, *Our Age: A Portrait of a Generation*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1990, £19.95 hbk.

historian or journalist of the period. The second, whether given in upper or lower case, is simply the expression of group taste. This deft switch of subject, object and predicate recurs throughout, and bears watching as it alternates between the active and the passive voice.

In his introductory passages, which are written with rather more brio than their successors, Lord Annan seems to set out to prove that Anthony Powell is a social realist:

You did not have to belong to the intellectual aristocracy to realise that family connections and intermarriage were an entrée to Our Age. John Lehmann and Christopher Isherwood were cousins of Graham Greene; Evelyn Waugh of Cland Cockburn. Right-wing Roy Campbell married the sister of a communist whose other sister married a partner of Lawrence and Wishart, the publishers of the Communist Party. Kathleen Raine married the marxist apostle Hugh Sykes Davis and then ran off with Charles Madge who later married the first wife of Stephen Spender.

There is, depend upon it, more in the same vein. (Annan also follows Powell in dwelling more on the delinquencies and absurdities of the Thirties Left, while airbrushing the fellow travellers of the Axis.) But this sort of effortless, familiar, polymathic fluency is what makes Lord Annan and Sir Isaiah Berlin into the intellectual and stylistic cynosure of the *New York Review of Books*: a near-faultless meld of cosmopolitanism with English irony and European high culture, marinated at the high tables of both ancient universities, and at ease with, if at a decent distance from, metropolitan power. At its best, the whole is crowned with a liberalism that both modifies and civilizes the institutions and privileges which sustain it. If asked to summarize the ethos, at least as evinced by this book, I should stay with the upper and lower case and point out that Marxism gets a small 'm' while Keynesianism, like the easy slang for a knighthood, is awarded a capital 'K'.

Lord Annan has mapped part of this world before, with biographies of Leslie Stephen and of his own public school headmaster, Roxburgh of Stowe. He probably captured his own poise and bearing to greatest effect and satisfaction by titling his best-known article, in 1956, 'The Intellectual Aristocracy'. Jowett-like in the affectation of omniscience, his numerous small errors are arguably the result of a tale worn too smooth by confident anecdotal repetition. Thus, in a discussion of Evelyn Waugh, Charles Ryder is said to have failed to get religion, and Bratt's Club is both misspelled and wrongly characterized. Willi Muenzenberg, Stalin's whipper-in among the modernists, is misnamed. Wilfred Owen's poetry is attributed to Siegfried Sassoon. Anthony Powell's own Roland Gwathkin is absurdly misidentified. *Partisan Review* is given the wrong founders. Sheila Rowbotham is placed in the wrong decade and generation. And is it not flatly untrue, as well as fatally condescending, to write of Bertrand Russell that 'It was a blow to his vanity that the police failed to oblige by arresting him when he joined demonstrations'? These and other blunders would be less confidence-shaking if they did not come from a historian whose stock in trade is the minute observation and the telling detail; the detail in which god or the devil is variously said to reside.

They come, also, from a historian who embellishes his style with that grand old chestnut from Leopold von Ranke: 'The present essay is more modest. It merely wants to show what it was really like.' The modesty, of course, is false. Such an undertaking, even suppose it to be feasible in its own terms, would require a considerable scholarly and intellectual outlay, and would by no means be 'mere'. It would have to engage with regnant conceptions, instead of recapitulating thrice-told tales about Bloomsbury, the Cambridge spies and the trial of Lady Chatterley. (Incidentally, on the oft-related story of that landmark court case, which he says 'delighted Our Age', Annan writes of Richard Hoggart's testimony that 'the grammar-school extra-mural lecturer from Leicester had worsted the Treasury counsel from Eton and Cambridge.' In what sense of Bowra's definition was this victory for the club which made up Our Age to begin with?)

Tautology is therefore as much a threat to the concept as is contradiction. But if we keep with von Ranke for a little longer, how did Annan and his peers test, or feel, 'what it was really like'? Make a vulgar calculus and notice what merits attention and what does not. The Vietnam War is never discussed at all. Roy Jenkins's tenure as everybody's favourite Home Secretary is awarded several pages; Harold Wilson's crushing of the seamen's union gets nothing. Rhodesia—nothing. Northern Ireland—nothing. Public school homosexuality—perhaps ten pages. The Official Secrets Act—one line. Suez—one sentence ('Suez brought to a head the greatest of all issues since Munich: European Union.') In other words, on the end of Empire—nothing much. Kim Philby—perhaps five pages. Feminism—nothing (though Sylvia Pankhurst is written out of the record in the casual statement that 'Immediately war was declared the Pankhursts enlisted the suffragettes'). Bulldog Drummond—three pages. Salman Rushdie—nothing. Immigration from the former colonies—virtually nothing. It cannot be without significance that the three chapters dealing with outsiders, deviants and rebels are devoted to Evelyn Waugh, F.R. Leavis and Michael Oakeshott.

### A Committee That Never Meets

When Wickham Steed was editor of *The Times*, and was challenged on its editorial formulations, he replied loftily that the paper's policy was determined by 'a committee that never meets'. Much of British public policy has likewise been determined by committees which do indeed meet, but which are selected, it seems, by another committee that does not. (The policy of *The Times*, on the other hand, is now determined by influences far less opaque.) Annan is one of the most lofty and distinguished members of that 'list of the great and the good' which furnishes the active membership of Royal Commissions, the discreet invigilators of broadcasting, the guiding spirits in the administration of opera and university finance, and the occasional emergency envoy for diplomacy. This alone makes his omission of Northern Ireland and Southern Rhodesia very striking, since the record of institutional failure in those cases can be condensed into the 'Commission' names—Pearce, Devlin, Widgery, Bingham—by which the serial bungles and cover-ups were registered or euphemized. The Pearce

Commission fiasco even compromised the once-unassailable Lord Goodman, who is elsewhere praised by Annan for—what else?—his contribution to the Opera establishment, and otherwise described as 'the most skilled conciliator of the day', which is, perhaps, less of a garland than the most skilled conciliator of Our Age. Annan could have been illuminating about this subfusc world and its composition, and must have chosen not to be.

But then, consideration—even mention—of these voluminous indices might perhaps have tended to qualify Annan's faith in the utilitarian, meliorist, *bona pensant* hierarchy, and in the ideology that sustains it. We encounter two specimens of the ideal committee-man very early on:

Such a man among Our Age, for example, was Lionel Robbins. Ostensibly Robbins was a professor at the LSE and an economist. In fact he was also chairman of the boards of the *Financial Times* and the National Gallery, and he sat on the boards of the Tate Gallery, the Royal Opera House and the Royal Economic Society. He served as President of the British Academy and was a life peer. Or consider Cyril Radcliffe, a lawyer who, without ever having been a puisne judge, was promoted direct to be a law lord. In the war he was director-general of the Ministry of Information and after it he was called in to determine the boundary line between India and Pakistan on partition and again in Cyprus; the chairman of two enquiries into taxation of profits and income; of the money and credit system; and of three enquiries into security. He was on the Court of the University of London and chairman of the British Museum Trustees.

'The stocks were sold, the press was squared, the middle class was quite prepared . . .' But in this awed recitation of awesome credentials, unconsciously reminiscent of Betjeman's satire on 'first-class brains' and 'Rolls Royce minds', there is no blood or fibre. What did Robbins and Radcliffe, these Whos of all Whos, *conclude* about the running of banks and colonies and museums? We learn nothing. When, in an earlier aside, it is laconically noted that Robbins put a stop to William Beveridge's invitation to the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt, thus thwarting their escape from Hitler's impending 'New Order' and quarantining Houghton Street and England from marxisant Continentalism, one almost starts from one's chair. A jagged point of conflict and interest! But it is fated to emulsify in the even flow of high-table reminiscence.

While defining the Robbins-Radcliffe type, however, Annan lets slip an illuminating formulation: 'They were sagacious, believed themselves to be liberal, were in fact sound conservatives on most issues, were loyal to any institution with which they were connected, and regarded those who criticized it as ignorant, malignant or ill-informed. Yet as they grew older it was inevitable that some of Our Age, like myself, who had fancied themselves as needlers of the Establishment, began to run institutions.' Though this again somewhat dilutes Annan's ill-articulated 'Our Age' definition, and though it shows how his prose becomes more confused as the nub approaches, it does capture something of the mild but firm and unmistakable *dirigisme* with which the postwar consensus was administered. But Annan's taxonomy of men of goodwill, of the impartial expert and the disinterested



academic and the broad-minded pedagogue, proves ultimately unsatisfactory even to himself. The book is almost three-fifths done when he first sounds the premonitory note: 'Unfortunately, Our Age were more concerned with how wealth should be shared than produced.'

Across this fragile pontoon—which at least serves to demarcate Our Age from marxism or Marxism more abruptly than any differences over *The Souls* or *Past and Present*—come at a canter the outriders of Correlli Barnett, 'Nico' Henderson and, gathering momentum, the apparently inevitable Thatcherite nemesis. In his review of Barnett and Henderson, Annan wavers in supporting their diagnosis. But in his assumption that Thatcherism was somehow a wealth-creating rather than wealth-distributing politics, he is unshakable. It is as if nothing had ever been contributed from the left on the problem of investment, production and diversification, and therefore as if the liberal elite had been culpably charitable and indifferent to the imperatives of industry.

Here is the unstated but latent crux for the self-assurance of Our Age. If the 'new' diagnosis convicted syndicalism, did they not form a most vulnerable *syndicat*? If the critique extended to cover corporatism, were not the Annanites a rather smooth and superior corporation, vertically and horizontally integrated into the quango business? More, such a pitiless diagnosis might turn out to be the wave of the future (Annan more than once confuses prescience with being on the winning side). Yet the chill exigencies of a renovated capitalism might disregard the civility, the urbanity, the *composure* with which Our Age had hoped to supply advice and consent. In a chapter of almost languorous masochism, entitled 'Was Our Age Responsible for Britain's Decline?' (which, by the way, could have read 'Were' if it was to be consistent with its more specific use elsewhere) Annan reviews the inattention to growth, competition and innovation that was exhibited by the British Establishment between, roughly speaking, the abandonment of the gold standard and the accession to the Treaty of Rome.

In a somewhat fractured attempt to deny the charge by affirming it, and in a related effort to demonstrate both prescience and retrospectively depth, Annan shows that his heart lies with the Roy Jenkins–Anthony Crosland school of 'structural reforms', and with the later attempt to found a political party based on similar precepts. He is all too aware of the fact that this tendency has gone the way of Schweik's 'Party of Moderate Progress Within the Limits of Law', and he has no time for the Labour Left, and indeed pays an oblique homage to the unlovely but effective Thatcherites. He thus, like any good committee man, makes an even distribution of honours. In effect, the established Left was wrong about the Common Market and the trade unions, and the conventional Right was wrong about the post-imperial illusion of a vast military outlay.

This division of responsibility, which actually resembles nothing so much as Harold Wilson in 1964, is not as trite as perhaps I make it sound. What might have been accomplished by a Left that was

ungrudgingly European, and which accepted the analogous repudiation of corporatism/syndicalism at home and Stalinism and US imperialism abroad, while taking an internationalist position on inherited responsibilities such as Cyprus, Zimbabwe and South Africa? The one certainty is that we shall never know, because no such 'Left' ever proposed itself. Nor did any principled centrism arise, such as would not have needed the permit of Washington and the opinion polls in proposing any of the above undertakings. By the logic of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, then, it was a mutated Tory populism which moved to address the protracted stalemate. The result—nationalism *within* Europe, independence for Zimbabwe, facing both ways on South Africa (as does Annan when it comes to the sanctions issue), simultaneous openness to Gorbachev *and* Beijing, a treatment of the United States almost as an equal, and a ruthless impatience with most forms of guild and municipal collectivism including even some of the hereditary ones—has set Our Age to the unsettling task of 'catching up' instead of 'suggesting'. No doubt this accounts for some of the breathlessness of Annan's raconteurship. As a snapshot of the improvised, uneven, intolerant, wasteful but partially dynamic processes of Thatcherism, it serves reasonably well.

### Ideas above the Battle

Annan is curiously reticent about the role of ideas in the evolution of the above compromise, even though he makes the requisite inclinations towards Hayek, Friedman and Walters. This is, first, because he can see the Peterhouse faction moving in behind them to take vengeance on the trimmers of Our Age; and, second, because he is wed of necessity to the maxim *Surtout, pas de zèle*. Valuable, at least until recently, principally against the radical Left, the counsel also partakes of ancient wisdom: the soothing, civilized distillate of Isaiah Berlin. This is repeatedly contrasted by Annan with the unwholesome barbarism (he refers to 'irrationalism crossing the Channel') of the distasteful 1960s. His rebuke to Christopher Hill, borrowed from J.H. Hexter, shows the method at work. Hill is above all an exhausting fellow, credited with almost unEnglish prodigies of industry ('beyond doubt prolific'; 'also enormously erudite') but convicted of constructing 'boxes cunningly fashioned to fit his own conception of the past'. Indeed, he is triumphantly quoted as admitting that he works to a theory! This might be described as Annan's fork: what if Hill had *not* testified to his own methodology, or had artfully pretended to be a populist interpreter of the school of Bishop Stubbs? He could and would be accused of being surreptitious.

How much better to praise Hugh Trevor-Roper, that contingent sympathizer of the *Annalists*, who 'never wrote an inelegant sentence or produced an incoherent argument'. Dacre's validation of a sinister pro-Nazi forgery seems not to have ruffled Our Age; not enough to rate a mention in any event, which one feels sure a comparable Zhdanovite error by Hobsbawm or Hill would have done. More surprisingly, perhaps, given his strongly expressed residual sympathy for the Spanish Republic, Annan seems to have overlooked Dacre's view, offered in the *New York Review of Books* in the course of yet another

discussion of the Cambridge traitors, that a Republican victory would have done no more than advance the date of the Hitler–Stalin pact. That this conception of a *conjecture*, which stunningly omitted any consideration of the other possible effects of a defeat for the Axis in Spain, might owe anything to a hidden conservative agenda does not seem thinkable to Annan. But his dislike of the ‘ideology’ of Hill and Carr, again expressed through the *dicta* of Isaiah Berlin, prevents him from appreciating the truth of Carr’s old truism that ‘to denounce ideologies in general is to set up an ideology of one’s own.’

Long ago and in better days, Conor Cruise O’Brien observed that intellectuals who were too fastidious to sacrifice ‘civility’ and ‘objectivity’ for the revolution could quite often be induced to make these very sacrifices for the *counter*-revolution. Berlin, I suspect, might see the irony and pith of this in a way that Annan does not. It is difficult to imagine Berlin writing, as Annan recently did (*London Review of Books*, 24 January 1991) that: ‘If we are to search for the progenitors of barbarism, where better than in those émigré circles in which Lenin moved and which were to institute the barbarism of Stalin’s regime and its antidote Hitler.’ Not only does this ill-wrought sentence, by its abysmal grammar, suggest that Lenin’s émigré circle *instituted* Hitler; it also repeats without digestion the most vulgar recent insinuations of Ernst Nolte, Andreas Hillgruber and the new/old revisionist historians of the German Right. And this crudity from an ostensible admirer of the German Renaissance! Carr could hardly have hoped for a neater posthumous vindication.

In his generalized and frequent application to Berlin, Annan seems almost to deprive the latter’s work of its intended force. So keen is he to place him above the battle that he all but disarms him, writing:

He [Berlin] read the work of philosophers long dead, indeed of some who would not in Oxford have been called philosophers—weird German romantics or Russian revolutionaries, Herder and Hamann, Belinsky and Herzen. He read them not to convict them of error and contrast them with the truth as we know it today. He did not use them to illustrate the climate of opinion of a past age. Nor did he divide them into those who point the way to saner times and those whom tyrants have used to justify their cruelty.

This is a very odd and bland means of glossing Berlin’s analysis of Herzen, for example—exhibited continually as a humane and tolerant (if defeated) alternative to Bolshevism. And it sits strangely with Berlin’s opinion of Herder that ‘For him men are men, and have common traits at all times; but it is their differences that matter most, for it is their differences that make them what they are, make them themselves, it is in these that the individual genius of men and cultures is expressed.’ Above all, it seems inconsistent with the attempt, however loose and inconsistently applied, to establish an elite supra-category, which presumably stresses bonds, commonalities and solidarities, and which also presumably attempts to impose structure and even to consider progress. A category such as Annan’s *Unsere Zeit*.

If *Our Age* contains an argument, it is organized about the tension

between utilitarianism and individualism. Individuals, of course, should not be considered as means, or sacrificed to what Annan scornfully terms 'teleology'. Yet there must be fiscal and other kinds of discipline, so that the mob does not eat the seed corn. To resolve this contradiction between the need for order and for postponement of gratification, and the need for the repudication of ideology or teleology, it is as well to have a disinterested class of guides and mentors. Their disinterest, which it would be risky or arrogant merely to presume, is fortunately demonstrable precisely by their hostility to systems of thought. Thus the committee that never meets. Like the 'unwritten' Constitution, or the 'invisible earnings' of the City of London, this is a definition and a method of exceptional convenience to those interested in ruling discreetly.

The two greatest freehand exercises in English periodization, G.M. Young's *Portrait of an Age* and George Dangerfield's *Strange Death of Liberal England*, both survive because they showed what was to come and why. Their method was paradoxical rather than dialectical, and rich in the illustration of unintended consequences. Annan's book, by contrast, is neither sufficiently complete to warrant a comparison with von Ranke, or sufficiently adventurous to be set against Dangerfield. Rather, it expresses the uneasy conscience of an elite which has looked after itself whichever party or regime has been in power, and which has somewhat blurred the distinction between doing good and doing well. It is torn between accounting, explaining and justification. An anecdote for *Our Age* was once given me by Simon Schama, who while at Cambridge was approached by Victor Rothschild (a man treated with much respect in the pages under review). Rothschild wished for a study of the role of his family in pioneer Zionism, and could supply original and authentic documents exclusively to the historian who took on the task. Would Schama accept the commission? Admittedly impressed by this overture from one so steeped in academe, diplomacy, think-tankery, security and the other special subjects of *Our Age*, Schama consented. While work was in progress on the book (which became *Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel*), disagreements developed between the two about the shape and emphasis. Victor Rothschild did not mince words. 'Do you happen to know,' he enquired, 'the Rothschild family motto?' Schama confessed that he did not. 'Our family motto,' returned the Establishment veteran, 'is *Service*.' A respectful pause. 'And by God,' he concluded, '*we get it*.' Or to put it another way, unacknowledged legislators are one thing; unelected or unaccountable ones are another. Annan's narrative of debonair deniability is an imperishable tome in the growing library of decline.

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Like other opponents of the war in the Gulf we feared that it would be extraordinarily destructive and would not much benefit those in Kuwait or Iraq who survived the conflict itself. In the event the results of the war have dismally fulfilled our worst forebodings. The allied war-damage assessment released in Riyadh estimates that one hundred thousand Iraqis were killed. A UN health mission has confirmed that Iraq's civil infrastructure has been comprehensively wrecked, imposing terrible privation and creating the conditions for ravaging epidemics. Kuwait and the wider Gulf region have suffered an unprecedented ecological calamity, and the majority of Kuwait's former residents now find themselves the targets of attacks and abuse; partisans of the ruling family have eliminated leading members of the democratic opposition. But meanwhile business flourishes and plump American vultures elbow aside the more mangy British and Egyptian contractors. Saddam Hussein's brutal invasion and occupation of Kuwait did justify international action, but not this horrendous slaughter nor the return of the country to 'royal rowdies' whose conduct is reminiscent of the defeated occupation. While the allies broadened their war aims to encompass the destruction of Iraq's water and sewage systems, they narrowed them to exclude concern for the democratic opposition in either Kuwait or Iraq.

In their war against Iraq the allies have displayed a cynical disregard for, and deception of, the Iraqi people and the Iraqi opposition. Bush invited the people to rise up, but once they had done so he extended a ceasefire to Saddam Hussein that allowed his army to turn on the rebels. The US administration evidently feared the impact on Saudi Arabia and other allies of an opposition victory in Iraq; though heteroclite, this opposition has endured for several years now under the banner of a democratic, non-confessional republic and might just possibly succeed in constructing it if given a chance. However, there is probably another reason for the new 'tilt' in Washington's policy. Under the terms of a draconian peace treaty, Iraq is to be obliged to sign away control over its national budget and foreign trade to an agency that will supposedly use the proceeds for war reparations. This scheme combines the vengefulness of the Versailles Treaty towards Germany with its colonialism towards the Middle East. But in order to work it will be necessary to find a suitably desperate and pliant regime in Baghdad—perhaps it was thought that

the Iraqi military were more likely to supply this than the opposition alliance of Kurds, Shiites and Communists.

Christopher Hitchens's reconstruction of US policy towards the Gulf not only documents collusion with the Saddam Hussein regime prior to August 1990 but also identifies the long-term goals of Washington's realpolitik. He cites a 1981 plan which anticipated Desert Storm and envisaged a permanent US presence. After the carnage and rhetoric of war, Washington now announces a new military centre in Bahrain. Despite Iran's new-found moderation Washington remains suspicious, largely because of the social and economic aspirations to which the Islamic revolution has given confused expression. Ervand Abrahamian contributes a study of Khomeinism as an ideology, stressing that it should not be read as a purely religious movement but rather as a specifically religious variant of populism, mobilizing popular hopes and energies behind the nationalist project of a new bourgeois class. Khomeinism constructed a thoroughly repressive confessional state in Iran by using anti-capitalist as well as anti-imperialist rhetoric. Yet today Teheran makes every effort to foster an unabashed Iranian capitalism just as it negotiates with Washington for a local role in the new world order.

The economic weakness and political vulnerability of the Soviet Union, China and the Third World critically undermined their capacity to oppose US ambitions. States which aspire to be pensioners of the 'international financial community' know they must keep in line on the big questions. Japan, despite its dynamism, remains dependent on US markets and has no seat on the Security Council. In Europe the many reservations held about the Gulf War came to nothing. The states of the European Community fell in with US plans with eager servility. In this case the source of weakness is not economic but rather a deficient political culture in which subservience to American leadership is one of the few binding agents. On one level this is visible in the politics of Kohl, Andreotti, Mitterrand and Major; at another, in the military structures of NATO; and, in a different way, even pan-European popular culture speaks with an American accent. In crucial respects Europe's popular culture and political identity is as yet unformed. In this issue Étienne Balibar considers the highly problematic nature of European identity, afflicted as it is by a racist distemper and marred as it is by the denial of citizenship to many ethnic minorities and migrant workers. Balibar addresses the shape and character of the new Europe in ways that pose urgent and disturbing tasks for the Left, notably the construction of a



continent-wide alliance against racial demagoguery. Adapting Hegel's dictum of 1800 concerning the Germany of the princes, he argues that 'there is no state in Europe', with the corollary that citizenship and democracy are also lacking.

The political profile of the new united Germany remains both enigmatic and central to Europe's future. Stephen Padgett and William Paterson survey the waxing and waning of the Social Democrats and the Greens in the old Federal Republic, and their lack of preparedness for the remarkable events that flowed from the breaching of the Berlin Wall. In their different ways the Social Democrats and the Greens both established a distinctive position within the West Germany of the *wirtschaftswunder*. Today they are being called upon to respond to qualitatively new strains and stresses—something like a new internal colonialism—while still having to contend with the dynamic of one of the world's strongest capitalisms. Yet, as Tilman Fichter points out, the diverse generations of the German Left, now drawing also on the distinctive forces of the new *Länder*, have proved politically creative in the past and may well rise to the new challenge. In the battles over unification the West German Left failed to establish itself as the champion of popular interests in the East. As large demonstrations again take place in Leipzig, expressing disillusionment with Kohl's false promises, a new opportunity presents itself.

In a most illuminating and thorough international survey Ellen DuBois examines the conjunctures which led to the enfranchisement of women. Female suffrage is often presented as the more or less ineluctable consequence of the impact of world war or some other large-scale social or political process, and the role of the votes-for-women campaigns consequently minimized. DuBois shows that the independent mobilization of women played a vital role in imposing the female franchise on reluctant legislatures. The parties and movements of the Left in the main eventually lent their support to the suffragette cause, but only after initial resistance and in part due to a sense of rivalry with bourgeois feminists. DuBois finds lessons for contemporary feminism and socialism in the turbulent events and unexpected alliances of the epoch when women won the vote.

In NLR 184 we published an article by Peter Bürger which challenged the postmodern thesis of 'the end of art'. In this issue Kate Soper considers the emergence of a more self-questioning mood in recent postmodern theory, one that promises to re-engage with questions of truth and value.

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## *Es Gibt Keinen Staat in Europa:* Racism and Politics in Europe Today

I would like to start by explaining how I came to modify the agreed theme and, to some extent, focus of this contribution.\* There were some general reasons for doing so, which occurred to me as I was reading the Congress programme, but recent political events provided a still more decisive impetus. The general title of our Congress—'Migration and Racism'—corresponds to a long-standing project that was conceived in a different conjuncture. It would seem to imply two ideas which, though being far from defunct, now need to be contextualized, or placed in a broader and more complex whole. It is clearer than ever that the problem we are discussing is crucial to a genuine human-rights policy in the years ahead of us. However, 'Migration and Racism' suggests that there is a particular correlation between two apparently well-defined phenomena, the one seeming to belong to the realm of economic and demographic facts, the other to the field of social behaviour and ideologies. This means that while the present pattern of migrations does not inevitably 'produce' racism—as a certain conservative discourse

frequently maintains—it does give *contemporary racism* a focus, such that in our countries it is above all an anti-immigrant racism directed against the *Gastarbeiter*, their families and their descendants. This is apparently what makes it distinctive in relation to other historical situations. There can be no doubt that French writers have been quite inclined to see things in this way, and our German friends have spontaneously done the same. This is the first idea that has to be examined.

This leads directly to the second idea. Is it certain that, in *every* European country, things can automatically be posed in such a way? Current terminologies would suggest that this is not at all the case. In Britain people speak of 'race relations', and the populations who are victims of racism are called 'Blacks' rather than 'migrants'—which evokes a much more directly post-colonial situation and imagery. In fact there is no real uniformity from one country to another, only a diversity of 'national' situations in which the link between migration and racism is unevenly imposed. The source and handling of immigration, the nature of racial discrimination, the level of social tensions, the scale of political repercussions, and particularly of organized racist and anti-racist movements—none of these is by any means the same in each country.

### A New European Racism

Nevertheless, we have had and still have reasons to suppose that these different configurations influence one another, and that in the last few years they have finally been converging to produce a formidable new phenomenon which we might call *European racism*. It is a question not just of analogies but of *institutional* phenomena that are given added momentum by the 'construction of Europe' and sustained by an ideal image of Europe itself. In fact discrimination is written into the very nature of the European Community, which in each country directly leads to the definition of two categories of foreigners with unequal rights. The developing EC structures—particularly if they give rise to thorny issues of individual movement, frontier controls, social rights, and so on—can only sharpen this trend and make the 'difference' between Community 'insiders' and 'outsiders' as such a locus of overt or latent conflict. The fact that, in Europe as a whole, a large proportion of 'Blacks' or 'immigrants' are not foreigners in the eyes of the law merely intensifies the contradictions, and intersects with the ever more pressing question of European identity. On the one hand, then, the emergence of a European racism, or model of racism, raises the issue of Europe's place in a world system, with its economic inequalities and population flows. On the other hand, it appears to be inextricably bound up with questions relating to collective rights, citizenship, nationality and the treatment of minorities, where the real political framework is not each particular country but Europe as such.

Here things become much more complicated, but recent events serve to clarify matters and to challenge at least some of our presuppositions.

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\* This paper was first delivered to the 'Migration and Racism' Congress in Hamburg, 27–30 September 1990.

In fact, what is the Europe we are speaking of? We cannot do without this reference, and yet we are quite incapable of fixing its meaning in any univocal manner. We cannot define 'Europe' today by reference either to a political entity, to a historical-cultural entity, or to an 'ethnic' entity. Perhaps the most obscure question of all is whether a 'definition of Europe' entails the possibility of 'defining Europeans', as members of a certain community, as holders of certain rights, and as representatives of a certain culture. It is a question fraught with the greatest significance for analysis of the institutional and ideological aspects of racism.<sup>1</sup>

The official image—I am now tempted to say the official myth—on which we ourselves lived for many years was that such definitions of Europe and Europeanness were possible in principle. It was sometimes asked whether, or to what degree, the 'construction of Europe' would eventually be carried through at the expense of national specificities, but no one really hesitated about the reference of the word 'Europe'. In our working project this reference simply went without saying: the real problem concerned 'migrations' and 'racism'. Now everything has changed and the opposite is the case. Before there can be any serious analysis of racism and its relationship to migrations, we have to ask ourselves what this word 'Europe' means and what it will signify tomorrow.

In reality, however, we are here discovering the *truth* of the earlier situation, which explodes the representation that we used to have of it. Europe is not something that is 'constructed', at a slower or faster pace, with greater or lesser ease; it is a historical problem without any pre-established solution. 'Migrations' and 'racism' form part of the elements of this problem.

Why has the situation been reversed? We all know the answer. It is because of the possible effects of three historic events succeeding one another within the space of a year: the collapse of the system of socialist states; the unification of Germany; and the outbreak of a major crisis in the Middle East likely at any moment to turn into a war which, though perhaps not a 'world war', would evidently not be 'local' and would require a new category. None of the three events has yet produced all its effects, and this is what makes the task of analysis both indispensable and exceptionally risky for us. There can be no doubt—particularly if one looks back to the causes—that they are closely interconnected. The nature of this link, which is not simply one of temporal succession, is not at all clear. But it is anyway certain that none of these events can now develop its effects independently of the other two, and that, *according to how these effects develop, the existence and nature of a 'European' entity will present itself in utterly different ways.*

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<sup>1</sup> We should note in passing that the question of giving an *endogenous*, self-referring definition of 'Europeans' has only come up very recently. Until the middle of the twentieth century, the principal meaning of this name referred to groups of colonizers in each of the colonized regions elsewhere in the world

## After the Cold War

Let us here just outline some of the questions posed. The collapse of 'actually existing socialism' is definitive: the political crisis and the economic crisis have in the end joined together. In a way this is the execution of the testament of 1968. But the collapse is issuing neither in a renewal of socialism or a 'third way' (as GDR intellectuals voicing the critique of the Honecker regime still thought a year ago), nor in the political liberalism dreamt of by new technocratic 'elites'. Its first results are administrative disintegration, a worsening of economic hardship, and an outburst of nationalism at every level. The ending of the political division of Europe is a *progressive* development of immense historical significance. It is understandably accompanied by a certain enthusiasm among intellectuals for the idea of 'European culture', and one can share this enthusiasm which is productive of new ideas and projects. But the mass ideological reality corresponding to this culture is *at first* one of exacerbated nationalisms or, to be more precise, an unstable equilibrium between the exacerbation of national particularisms and the advance of the 'American' model of consumption and social communication.

In its fall, 'actually existing socialism' carries away both the bureaucratic state and single-party apparatus and the egalitarian utopia of the nineteenth-century workers' movement. But the outcome is not at all the 'end of history', the triumph of a 'liberal' system of regulating social conflicts. On the contrary, once the great simplifying opposition between 'ideologies' and 'camps' has been annulled, we can expect a rapid differentiation of 'liberalism' itself—in particular, a re-emergence of the problem of *democracy in capitalism*, since the identity of the two terms is no longer 'guaranteed' by the presence in the East of a system at once anti-capitalist and anti-democratic.

The greatest and most acute uncertainty at the present moment concerns the effects of the Middle East crisis. Of course, these will depend completely on whether or not we slide into war, and on the length and destructiveness of any such conflict. But they will inescapably bring about a reshaping of the 'camps' as they are now drawn. We can at least make three observations which will remain valid in any hypothesis.

First, the end of the Cold War is establishing the United States as the only superpower. But in the present situation, instead of bringing an attenuation of conflicts, this means the impossibility of a stable world order, the necessity of actual resort to force, and probably the formation of several 'regional' imperialisms.<sup>2</sup>

Second, we are now coming out of a phase in which the countries of the North successfully, and with no regard for the consequences, 'exported' the crisis to the Third World, so that their own economic

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<sup>2</sup> Naturally, one key element in the 'linkage' between new sub-imperialisms in the South and the crisis of imperialisms in the North is the weight of arms production and exports in the latter's economy and politics.

stabilization was paid for through the absolute pauperization of the other, 'third' countries. The phase we are entering will be one in which conflicts over the control of oil and other raw materials will endanger social and economic equilibrium in the 'developed' countries themselves.

Third, we can see a tightening 'linkage' of political and social development in the Middle East and the European countries—or in other words, the effective constitution (or reconstitution) of a 'Mediterranean' ensemble that is highly conflictual in the dimensions of religion, culture, economics and politics. The two complexes making up the 'Arab nation' and the 'European nation'—neither of them securely fixed, for different historical reasons—are closely bound up with each other and cannot evolve independently.<sup>3</sup> But the future 'iron curtain' and the future 'wall' threaten to pass somewhere in the Mediterranean, or somewhere to the south-east of the Mediterranean, and they will not be easier to bring down than their predecessors.

At this point we must try to give some thought to the likely effects of current events upon the 'construction of Europe'. I feel quite incapable of making any prophecies, but it is necessary to put forward some working hypotheses for discussion. The first of these is of a negative character: namely, that in spite of the moves towards transnationalization of European societies, which cannot be rolled back, and in spite of the probably irreversible changes at the level of institutions, *the political-economic 'little Europe' will not come about as expected.*

This narrow European Union, part supranational and part confederal, developed as a rival to American power, though associated with it in the framework of political-military confrontation between East and West. The political victory of the United States over the Soviet Union—whose continued existence as such is itself now in question—has gone together with a relative weakening of US economic supremacy in the world. Eastern Europe is being opened up as a priority field for expansion of the capitalist market, and this too is likely to sharpen competition between Europe and the United States. But in this competition not all European countries, even in the West, have the same interests and the same possibilities. Chauvinist, anti-German discourse, audible in France and elsewhere in Europe since the reunification of the two Germanies became a foregone conclusion, rests upon analogies and an imagery of national conflict in Europe that probably belong to a past age. Nevertheless, whereas the construction of Europe was based on a relative equilibrium between several countries, it is now facing a huge internal *imbalance* of power and a patently uneven capacity for economic and political exploitation of the 'new frontier' in the East. The Gulf crisis also shows very clearly that the various EC countries do not have the same interests, or do not assess

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<sup>3</sup> Important in this respect are not only the 'Muslim' populations in Europe but also the European or Europeanized enclaves in the 'Arab' world (Israel, the various multilingual and multicultural societies stemming from French colonization, and so forth). There is also an interlocking of interests, symbolized by the organically coupled financial strengths of Kuwait and the City of London

their interests in the same way, in the confrontation between American imperialism and the 'sub-imperialisms' of the Middle East. These are all lasting factors of dissension, even if their political effect cannot be immediately foreseen.

It is therefore worth dwelling for a moment on the following two interpretative schemas. First, Europe will more and more be not a closed entity like a federal state or a multinational empire, but rather an *open* aggregation with several concentric circles of supranational institutions in unstable equilibrium. It will form an area where different economic-cultural aggregates—whose historic specificity, in each case, is at least as strong as that of 'European unity' itself—meet, and if necessary clash, with one another. These will be: a *Euro-American* aggregate, a *Euro-Mediterranean* (mainly Euro-Arab or Euro-Muslim) aggregate, and a *Euro-ex-Soviet* or *Euro-Eastern* aggregate comprising all or some of the countries which, having been stamped by the socialist regime, face the task of 'liquidating' it. These aggregates, of course, are not juxtaposed to one another but largely superimposed. *There are not one but several 'common homes' in Europe.*

Second, this externally open aggregation, by virtue of being an area of intersection between several world spaces rather than a truly autonomous unit, is not and will not be any less *partitioned* by a number of ineliminable 'frontiers'. These are not just political state frontiers but, above all, moving social frontiers, 'invisible' on the maps but materialized in administrative regulations and social practices; 'inner frontiers' between populations who differ in origin and in their location within the division of labour. In fact this 'Europe' is already and will be more and more the meeting point between several types of political-economic migration, particularly from 'the South' and from 'the East'. For both ideological and economic reasons, an attempt will be made to give them different statuses, by facing up to acquired obstacles (especially the post-colonial situations) and embarrassing promises such as those made at Helsinki.

What is thus taking shape is a 'melting pot', or an unstable hierarchical complex of ethnic-social groups. But unlike the American experience, which it might otherwise call to mind, it presupposes not the erasing of original nationalities but their perpetuation in a different gear.

### A Historic Reversal

If these very general prospects are accurate, they imply a kind of reversal of the secular course of history, some further aspects of which we shall look at in a moment. Whereas Europe, for three centuries, exported to the whole world its political models and the consequences of its conflicts between nations and 'blocs', an opposite process is now coming into view. 'The world strikes back': Europe is the prime site where the political problems of the whole world are crystallizing—if not the weak link, then at least the sensitive point of their contradictions.

This situation takes on its full meaning in an examination of the



'German question'. Recent events have led most commentators to conclude that the German national (and nationalist) tradition, which people had forgotten or pretended to forget, is resurging before our eyes as a determining factor in European history. In short, it would seem that there will be either a 'German Europe' or a Germany without Europe. Without denying the element of truth in this observation, we might set it against the dialectically opposite idea that Germany, of all European countries, will face the crisis of the 'nation' form at its most acute. One reason for this is that there is nothing self-evident in the reproduction of a single 'German people' out of the populations of the ex-GDR and the ex-FRG. Most important, however, if we assume that it is impossible to block freedom of movement—the very freedom in whose name the countries of Eastern Europe rebelled—then *Germany will be the potential concentrate of all the 'differences' and all the ethnic and social tensions of which we have been speaking.* Berlin, as the political-geographic centre of a historical area encompassing London, Stockholm, Warsaw, Moscow, Budapest, Istanbul, Baghdad, Cairo, Rome, Algiers, Madrid and Paris, cannot become the capital of the new Germany without also being the 'centre' of political tensions emanating from the various regions in this space.

We can now return to the question, or rather questions, of racism as it shows itself and develops within this framework. I am increasingly of the view that what we have to analyse—and what the term 'neo-racism' only imperfectly expresses—is not just a variant of the earlier racisms from which our 'definitions' and schemas derive. Rather, we are dealing with a *new* configuration, one that will be more and more so as it 'reflects' the originality of the social structure and the relationships of force that are being constituted in Europe at the end of the twentieth century. This is why the very word 'race', and such complements or substitutes as colour, ethnicity, outsidership, immigration or even religion, is today changing its meaning, as it has already done two or three times as a function of the great 'revolutions' of modern history. But for such a configuration actually to crystallize from one end of society to the other, sinking into everyday perceptions of the 'differences' or 'otherness' of human groups and into the technical language of administration, communication and social science, three quite different types of factor probably have to be superimposed on one another. First, there has to be a tradition or schema of *collective memory*, part conscious, part unconscious, which is marked by 'traumatic' events, blended into the actual history of institutions and culture, and periodically reactivated by historical events that indicate its persistence. Second, a *social structure of discrimination* has to exist in actual life; one which, if not stable, serves the necessary functions in economic and class relations and is at least partially inscribed within the organization of the state. Third, there has to be a *conjuncture* of institutional crisis, in which the relationship of institutions (above all the state) to their own ideological foundations, and the 'identity-constituting' relationship of individuals to those institutions, are violently shaken in such a way as to produce a mass phenomenon of intellectual and moral insecurity.

These elements can be detected in the present situation almost

everywhere in Europe. They help to explain, in particular, how a subterranean link is established between the evolution of 'public opinion' and of openly racist political movements—movements which, though small-scale except in France, are capable of imposing on the whole society at least part of their 'problematic'. As we go through the list of them, we begin to understand both that racism in Europe has very deep, *permanent* roots and foundations, and that a quite special conjuncture is required for it to become a *political* phenomenon capable of hegemonizing, if not organizing, masses of people in several nations and social layers.

### Ideological Schemas of Racism

In fact European culture, and so the very idea or myth of Europe, intrinsically contains, though is not identical with, two specifically racist *ideological schemas* which are likely to continue producing memory and collective-perception effects: the colonial schema, and the schema of anti-Semitism. This is quite familiar ground, but a number of observations would be in order here.

First, 'decolonization' was never completed, particularly in countries like France, nor did it go together with a new collective awareness of what had been involved in the 'division of the world' among so-called 'civilized' nations, which in reality had been the bearers of barbarism. Second, while colonization was a European enterprise, for which the Berlin Conference of 1885 might serve as the symbol, anti-Semitism too was a European phenomenon. Without in any way softening the condemnation of Nazism, it is time to put paid to the myth of absolute German peculiarity in this respect. The evidence is today unfortunately all too striking when, at the two ends of Europe, in France and the ex-socialist countries, the intensification of nationalism is accompanied by the reconstitution of overt anti-Semitism. There are also, to be sure, other forms of xenophobia. But there is no doubt in my mind that if the sharpest edge of racist discourse and mentalities tends to press on the populations of 'Arab-Islamic' origin who have permanently settled in Europe, this is because a *condensation* or superimposition of the colonial and anti-Semitic schemas has occurred in this case, so that imagery of racial superiority and imagery of cultural and religious rivalry reinforce each other.

It is essential to refocus on the traditional schemas of European racism if we are to analyse the paradoxes of the relationship between racist discourse or ideology and nationalist discourse or ideology.<sup>4</sup> Most of the time, racism is not at all functional from the point of view of nationalism; on the contrary, it sets up divisions within it that are at once superfluous and cumbersome. And yet there is virtually no historical example of nationalism *without* a racist supplement. I think that racism is an elaboration and forward rush of the contradictions of nationalism, driven both by its historical necessity and by its

<sup>4</sup> I have tried to show elsewhere that this relationship functions according to a logic of 'supplement' or 'excess'. See the chapter 'Racism and Nationalism' in I. Wallerstein and E. Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, forthcoming London 1991.

practical impossibility. (I say impossibility because no nationalism can achieve in the real world its ideal of a purified, totally hegemonic community.) But this forward rush would not be possible if it were not at the same time a *rush backwards*—that is to say, if racist schemas of thought were not deposited in the past of nationalism. Ideological efficacy is the efficacy of the past: indeed, we might even say that ideology as such is nothing but this efficacy.

And yet it is quite evident that no explanation in terms of the past can supply the reasons why racist perceptual schemas of national, ethnic and social 'difference' are reactivated and combined in a new way. It is therefore necessary *at the same time* to track down the structural foundations of present-day racism.

The structure that has so far received the most analytic attention—particularly in countries like France where a Marxist tradition of interpreting social contradictions is combined with the massive and long-standing presence of immigrant workers who have come in successive waves from all parts of the world—is the socioeconomic foundation. Or, to be more precise, it is the existence of institutional discrimination based on employment structures and, more fundamentally, on the systematic use by capitalism of a mechanism for differential reproduction of the labour force. At least at a general level, there is a match between (a) skill grading; (b) proportion of foreign workers; (c) the various modes of work-force reproduction which allow capital to reduce training and upkeep costs on unskilled workers by bringing them from dominated ('peripheral') regions of the world economy, where non-commodity modes of production partly prevail and which lack those 'social rights' that the labour movement of the 'advanced' countries has been able to impose for more than a century.

It is precisely this mode of differential reproduction which the European Community officially ratifies and will probably seek to protect—the only qualification being that it *also* introduces mechanisms for the incorporation of ex-colonial populations in the European space, which would appear to be counter-productive in terms of capitalist profitability. To use Wallerstein's terminology, this situation structurally underpins a process of *ethnicization* of grading systems and inequalities within the general workforce, whose 'subjective' counterpart is that institutionalization of racial-cultural prejudices among dominators and dominated, and above all among the dominated themselves, on which ruling-class policy can play at its own risk. Wallerstein adds that technological changes, and above all the new configurations of the world market, force a continual shift in the demarcations that are 'functional' to the system. Thus, in France before the war, the demarcation lines passed mainly between the French and the Italians, Poles and Spaniards; today they tend to run between 'Europeans' and people from 'the South' (Asians excepted). We can therefore expect that ethnic imagery crystallized in ideological stereotypes will continually lag behind the real relations, which are actually 'ethnicized' class relations.

This analysis seems to me unassailable at its own level. But I would just like to add a couple of supplementary points. First, it is true that differential reproduction of the labour force, which plays on the opposition between centre and periphery, is a constant feature of the history of capitalism. But its social and political effects are today being modified by revolutionary changes in the organization and functioning of communications. The capitalist world is no longer just a 'world economy': it is also a space of unified and monopolized world communications in which, potentially, all populations are somehow immediately 'visible' to, and in contact with, one another.<sup>3</sup> Such a world has never before existed in history. Thus, the '*two humanities*' which have been culturally and socially separated by capitalist development—opposites figuring in racist ideology as 'sub-men' and 'super-men', 'underdeveloped' and 'overdeveloped'—do not remain external to each other, kept apart by long distances and related only 'at the margins'. On the contrary, they interpenetrate more and more within the same space of communications, representations and life. Exclusion takes the form of *internal exclusion at world level*: precisely the configuration which, since the beginnings of the modern era, has fuelled not only xenophobia or fear of foreigners, but also racism as fear and hatred of *neighbours* who are near and different at the same time.

Now, the development of class racism, even in countries where the labour movement has had an internationalist tradition, corresponds to the passage from a phase of 'extensive' accumulation—in which immigrant workers were recruited *en masse* but confined to special jobs—to a phase of crisis and unemployment, followed by new, 'intensive' accumulation which cuts unskilled labour to a minimum in the industries and services of the 'centre'. This sequence has coincided with the relative stabilization in the EC area of populations such as the Turks in Germany or the North Africans in France who were originally imported from abroad in the fifties and sixties. This relative stabilization has meant 'family regroupment' and the emergence of a 'second' or even 'third' generation which cannot be discriminated against in the same way as the first.

The result of all this is that, although the cleft within the labour force is still a class relation, the dominant aspect no longer tends to be super-exploitation. Rather it is competition on the labour market in a context of change, *common* pauperization of masses of 'national' and foreign workers, and the formation of ghettos housing an industrial reserve army or, to use William Julius Wilson's expression, a multiracial and multicultural underclass. Here we come to the structural phenomenon which characterizes the current phase and constantly fuels tensions between the exploited themselves: *ethnic 'difference' is globally maximized (at the level of the world) but locally minimized (at the level of the town).*

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<sup>3</sup> To gain a sense of the novelty, and the paradox, involved in this situation, the reader may like to refer back to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (London 1983). The community is 'imagined' or 'imaginary', in Anderson's analysis, because the individuals who compose it do not, for the most part, ever meet or 'see' one another. But in the world today, 'nationals' who still do not see one another as such are continually meeting 'non-nationals' in the street or seeing them on television, and vice versa.

Unless this paradox is analysed in detail, it is impossible to understand the formation of 'neo-racism' and, in particular, the tendency for 'biological' stereotypes forged in the epoch of slavery and colonization to pass into 'cultural' stereotypes corresponding to the search for 'little differences' between equally impoverished proletarians.

### The Role of the State

These further analytical points cannot suffice, however, for they remain caught within the area of economy; or, to be more precise, they cling to an immediate correspondence between economic structures and ideological formations. They abstract from the essential mediation through which economic tendencies are articulated to collective representations in modern societies. I am referring to the role played by the state right down to the organization of everyday relations between individuals, and so to the effects that the crisis of state institutions has upon 'mass thinking'.

This dimension seems to me absolutely determinant, and it takes us back to our earlier question regarding the articulation between racism and nationalism, and the form this takes in the present conjuncture. I would like to propose the following thesis. In essence, modern racism is never simply a '*relationship to the Other*' based upon a perversion of cultural or sociological difference; it is a relationship to the Other *mediated by the intervention of the state*. Better still—and it is here that a fundamentally unconscious dimension needs to be conceptualized—it is *a conflictual relationship to the state which is 'lived' distortedly and 'projected' as a relationship to the Other*.

This would explain why 'national preference', as the French Far Right has called it, is of such formidable importance in the present-day racist complex. This national preference is both an objective institution and a phantasm through which all national individuals tend to perceive the special character of their own relationship of dependence and demand vis-à-vis the state. It is in the power of none of us to escape this entirely: for that would require being able to free oneself from dependence on the state. And we are all the less able to do so if we are *less privileged* in actual life, if we ourselves suffer manifold discrimination, are treated as 'subjects' rather than 'citizens', by the functioning of the state administration, the educational system, the political machine, and so on.

In fact it is the state qua nation-state which actually produces national or pseudo-national 'minorities' (ethnic, cultural, occupational). Were it not for its juridical and political intervention, these would remain merely potential. Minorities only exist in actuality from the moment when they are codified and controlled. Similarly it is the state which, for more than a century, has established the strictest possible correlation—which can never be total, however—between citizenship or nationality rights and individual or collective social rights, thereby becoming itself a '*national-social state*'. All the 'advanced' states, especially European states whether capitalist or socialist, are national-social states. The state's family policy is at the heart of this apparatus

—which helps to make it a highly sensitive aspect of racial and xenophobic imagery. Lastly, it is the state which develops in a contradictory manner what might be called a *security apparatus resting on insecurity*: that is, an administrative, police and judicial apparatus designed to protect one part of the population while increasing the risks for another part, without it ever being possible to draw clearly, at the necessary place, the demarcation line between the two 'groups' or 'populations'.<sup>6</sup> The modern state, for instance, opens the door to 'clandestine' circulation of the foreign labour force, and at the same time represses it. It is thus the source of an image of itself as an over-powerful and powerless machine—a profoundly traumatic image for individuals.

In these conditions, the question which seems to me ultimately decisive for the developmental tendencies of racism in Europe, and to which I think we should continue to give thought, is the following: *What is the state today in Europe?* I would stress the importance of the way in which the question is formulated. It does not ask what the 'European state' is today, for such a question probably does not have a univocal meaning. The point is rather to take a very long-term perspective for analysing the evolution of the historical *forms* of the state institution, and to ask within that perspective what the state is tending to become, how it is behaving, and what functions it is fulfilling in the *European space* whose complexity we have just seen—a space which, in particular, cannot simply be reduced to the figure of a 'territory'.

No doubt such a question cannot be posed in simple terms, involving as it does more than one dimension. For example, one of the great enigmas, to which there is still no clear answer, concerns the state forms that will eventually succeed the old 'socialist' states, and the impact they will have on the status of politics in Europe as a whole. Nevertheless, we cannot evade the question of 'what the state is today in Europe'. I, at least, am convinced that it is the key to our project of analysing racism and foreseeing its lines of development.

### Ambiguities of the State in Europe

Here too, it is a negative characteristic which first imposes itself. The state today in Europe is *neither national nor supranational*, and this ambiguity does not slacken but only grows deeper over time. In practice this has the following significance in the economic-financial and social or juridical domains. In the distribution of powers between the level of 'national states' and the level of 'Community institutions', a continual redundancy, a competition between institutions, is becoming apparent. But what actually shapes reality is more a process tending towards decomposition or deficiency of the state—a deficiency in power, in responsibility and in public qualities. The 'state' in Europe is tending to disappear as a power-centralizing institution, one to

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<sup>6</sup> The phantasm of the racist state, as instituted by Hitler, was precisely that individuals of the superior race should permanently feel in total security, and individuals of the inferior race in permanent insecurity. But the mechanism has a tendency to function upside down: those who, because of the state itself, are in a situation of insecurity perceive themselves and are perceived as belonging to 'another race'.

which responsibility for policy can be ascribed and which exercises 'public' mediation (in both senses of the term) between social interests and forces. We might also express this by saying that we have entered a phase of new-style 'privatization' of the state, but in the guise of a multiplication and superimposition of public institutions.

This is probably due to the fact that there is no prior model, no historical precedent, for a state of this type, which stems from heterogeneous causes but is fundamentally conceived as *the state institution of a market*, a kind of 'liberal' utopia in practice. This utopia has had and will continue to have real effects, just as the opposing communist utopia had real effects. But it is attempting to pass over into reality during a historical epoch when the absolutely 'free' market can no longer exist. Any market today is inescapably a relationship of forces between public and private corporations of transnational scale, and any market is at once a *social* and an economic organization. However, what immediately strikes one about European construction is that, except for a few cover speeches, it *does not have a genuinely social dimension*. Neither market forces nor governments wanted a European state as a social state (we are tempted to say: social supranational state). And for a number of basic historical reasons, such a state could not be imposed, or even truly contemplated, by the labour movement at the time when it was in a position to influence the course of events. But precisely because it is today impossible to trace the frontier between social right and public right—or, if one prefers, 'social citizenship' and 'political citizenship'—the final conclusion is that *there is no 'European' law-governed state*. Plagiarizing Hegel's famous remark, I will therefore risk saying: *Es gibt keinen (Rechts)staat in Europa*.<sup>7</sup>

The upshot that we see all around us, including in the question that concerns us at this congress, is what might be called the reign of statism without a true state. If we understand by statism a combination of administrative/repressive practices and contingent arbitration of particular interests, including those of each nation or the dominant classes of each nation, then that is what is taking the place of the state, while giving the impression of a proliferation of the state. The invasion of power is the power of a vacuum. In many respects, this is like the situation we have grown used to seeing in the Third World, and which we take to be bound up with economic and cultural 'underdevelopment'. All the conditions are therefore present for a collective sense of *identity panic* to be produced and maintained. For individuals fear the state—particularly the most deprived and the most remote from power—but they fear still more its disappearance and decomposition. The anarchist and Marxist tradition never understood this, and has paid a very heavy price.

No doubt I will be asked what conclusions I draw here for the analysis of racism, and what practical attitude we might develop towards it. The following propositions lay no claim to originality. They seek only to lay the basis for a resolutely political approach to the question: that is,

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<sup>7</sup> See Hegel, *Die Verfassung Deutschlands*, a manuscript from 1799/1800. 'Deutschland ist kein Staat mehr.'

to identify the goals and means of anti-racist action, not only on the indispensable ground of ethics, ideology and welfare policies but above all on the ground of politics. I also do this in the idea that we are dealing not with a vicious circle but with a reciprocal relationship. Today the development of anti-racism as a transnational movement within, but necessarily going beyond, the European space undoubtedly contains one part of the perspectives for a renewal of democratic politics.

For the moment it is only in France that a unified racist political movement, or neo-fascism, has acquired significance, and we can see why it would be difficult for such a movement to develop and, above all, to unite in Europe: it would have to solve at one stroke the contradictions between nationalisms, secondarily between religious fundamentalisms, and so on. Nevertheless, *racist politics* exists as a tendency in Europe today. But is there an *anti-racist* politics? The answer is that there are only attempts. And this time I am tempted to say that anti-racist movements of opinion will become genuinely political only when they organize or coordinate their efforts at a European level. One of the conditions for this, particularly difficult to achieve, is that 'minorities' subject to discrimination should also, *first of all*, themselves succeed in finding a common language and common objectives, and in coordinating their own activities.

I recalled above the point already made by others that it is today impossible to trace a clear demarcation line in Europe between 'indigenous' and 'exogenous' populations, either in their living conditions or their culture, or even in terms of rights. (Most national law, and even Community law itself, have had to concede that foreign workers and their families have the same 'fundamental social rights' that 'Community' workers possess.) In making this point, I evidently suggested that this was one of the focuses for popular or class racism, especially within the working class. And this really is the danger, both for minorities and for democracy in general. But it is also—let's be cautious—what makes thinkable a reconstitution of political class movements. The classical labour movement was centred on production, and it had internationalism as a historical condition and a less and less effective horizon. A future anti-capitalist popular movement will probably have as its basis the inequalities that are suffered in common in a large number of social practices other than just production—for instance, education and living conditions. It certainly presupposes an effective anti-racism in tomorrow's Europe, something much more than internationalism.

### Citizenship and Popular Sovereignty

But anti-racism in turn will not be able to resonate unless the question of *citizenship in Europe*—which is quite simply the other side of the problem of the state in Europe—is posed in all its dimensions. Again I say *citizenship in Europe* to avoid the ambiguities in the idea of 'European citizenship' or a fortiori 'the citizenship of Europeans', which is what would result if citizenship in Europe were defined only as the 'sum' of national citizenships; but that is anyway impossible.

The political aspect of the discriminatory structure within the



European space, or of the ethnic-social complex I discussed at the beginning, is that independently of official frontiers some individuals are de facto citizens and others are subjects within the European space. But whereas the former are citizens of a non-existent state, the latter cannot in practice be kept in an absolutely rightless position, unless it comes to forms of organized violence. This untenable situation will last as long as a compulsion is not felt to know *what the people is* in Europe: that is, to know how popular sovereignty is conceived and organized there, given that Europe wishes to be the space and example of a 'democratic' politics. It is necessary to turn away from the formula 'We are a people' (*Wir sind ein Volk*) or 'We are peoples', and to revert to '*Wir sind das Volk*' (We are *the* People), or rather to the question: '*Was ist das, "das Volk", in Europa?*'

This question, however, concretely entails many others that are its own components: the question of a universal right to vote, not just for its own sake but as a symbol of everyone's right to politics and hence to democratic control of state organizations and economic policies; the question of cultural equality between different historical populations who, in reality, contribute to the formation of European public opinion; the question of equal social and civil rights to which I have already alluded. And finally there is the question of the articulation between local (essentially urban) citizenship and international or transnational citizenship. Since it is impossible to extend the model of national citizenship, or of the national-social state, to a European level, other political roads and other legal formulas must be found to enhance civil relationships on both this side and the other side of the nation. In making this long detour through questions of theory and contemporary life, my only aim has been to reaffirm the indissociability of these different exigencies. Every state is not necessarily democratic, but a non-state by definition cannot be democratized.

September 1990

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## Woman Suffrage and the Left: An International Socialist-Feminist Perspective

It is difficult to imagine a richer subject for a comparative history of democracy than the enfranchisement of women. Despite casual remarks about various governments 'granting' women the vote, enfranchisement in the overwhelming number of cases was preceded by a women's movement demanding it. Indeed, extending over more than a century and including most nations of the globe, the cause of woman suffrage has been one of the great democratic forces in human history. Whereas manhood suffrage, for instance, or the breaking of the political colour bar, have occurred more erratically, with limited links between national experiences, woman suffrage has been a self-consciously transnational popular political movement. As such, it resembles nothing so much as international socialism. Notwithstanding the subject's richness, much of the history remains to be explored. This is especially true in the Third World, where enfranchisement, measured by numbers of countries in which women vote, has actually been accelerating since the 1940s. One factor that has discouraged scholarship,

especially from a left perspective, is the assumption that the enfranchisement of women has been, on balance, a conservative development. This notion, which predates not only the actual enfranchisement of women but even the heyday of the woman-suffrage movement itself,<sup>1</sup> has left, right, and even feminist versions. However, all are based more on prejudice than serious analysis. As Carole Pateman has observed, 'Remarkably little attention has been paid by either theoretical or empirical students of politics to the political meaning and consequences of manhood and womanhood suffrage.'<sup>2</sup>

A classic example of this interpretation is Richard Evans's survey of the history of international suffragism, *The Feminists*.<sup>3</sup> The demand for woman suffrage, he argues, was rooted in classical liberalism and first emerged around 1848. However, inasmuch as the enfranchisement of women was so long delayed (or, as we might say, so fiercely resisted), its achievement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century coincided with and participated in the decline and exhaustion of liberalism. (George Dangerfield titles his history of England in this period, in which the woman-suffrage movement plays a major part, *The Strange Death of Liberal England, 1910-1914*.) Evans shares the common assumption that woman suffrage was an essentially 'bourgeois feminist' demand. Led by elite and conservative 'ladies', he argues, the turn-of-the-century movement abandoned its roots in universal-suffrage traditions, and struck a Faustian bargain in which it accepted property restrictions in order to get the vote for privileged women. In Germany, he contends, woman suffrage was deliberately adopted as a tool against the upsurge in proletarian political challenges. 'The enfranchisement of women was seen,' he writes, 'both by politicians and by the suffragists themselves, as a means of controlling society in the interests of the "stable" part of the population, the middle classes.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> During the 1875 debate over whether to include woman suffrage in the founding document (the Gotha Programme) of the German Social Democratic Party, opponents cited the allegedly reactionary political tendencies of women, to which Wilhelm Liebknecht responded: 'Opponents of female suffrage often maintain that women have no political education. But there are plenty of men in the same position, and by this reasoning they ought not to be allowed to vote either. The "herd of voters" which has figured at all the elections did not consist of women. A party which has inscribed "equality" on its banner flies in the face of its own words if it denies political rights to half of the human race.' Quoted in Werner Thönnesson, *The Emancipation of Women: The Rise and Decline of the Women's Movement in German Social Democracy 1863-1933*, London 1969, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Carole Pateman, 'Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy', in Anne Phillips, ed., *Feminism and Equality*, London 1987, p. 12. Similarly, Vicky Randall, in her overview, *Women and Politics: An International Perspective*, Basingstoke 1987, observes that 'the generalization of female conservatism requires careful qualification' (p. 73).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Evans, *The Feminists. Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia 1840-1920*, London 1977. Evans's scholarship is based on the German SPD.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217. Ross Evans Paulson (*Women's Suffrage and Probation: A Comparative Study of Equality and Social Control*, Illinois 1973) has a similar evaluation of woman suffrage, but applauds rather than criticizes what he regards as its ultimate conservatism. This judgment of woman suffrage as essentially conservative has also been phrased in feminist terms. In this version the argument is that woman suffrage represents a retreat from radicalism in feminist, as well as in class, politics. Here the argument is that votes-for-women substitutes formal, legal equality for other, more radical aspects of the feminist movement—for instance, challenges to conservative sexual morality. In

A slightly modified version of this interpretation acknowledges that socialists advocated woman suffrage but emphasizes the irreconcilable conflict between the bourgeois woman-suffrage movement and proletarian socialism, particularly in the 1890-1920 heyday of both.<sup>5</sup> Such accounts characteristically begin with classic texts to demonstrate that Marx and Engels recognized the existence of women's oppression, for which they prescribed the overthrow of capitalism. Then the story moves on to August Bebel's *Woman in Socialism* (1879), a much reprinted book which clarified and advanced socialism's commitment to women's emancipation. From there, the leadership shifts to Clara Zetkin, in response to whose urgings the Second International welcomed in working-class women. The socialist women's movement that she commanded rejected all collaboration with the bourgeois suffrage movement—'correctly', it is claimed, since mainstream feminism sought to split the working class politically and lure its women away. Socialist parties nonetheless supported women's suffrage, often before bourgeois parties, even though they recognized that women's oppression was fundamentally economic. Despite socialist support—which in countries like Germany was crucial to the enfranchisement of women—when women voted, it is claimed, they voted disproportionately for conservative parties.

### Socialist-Feminism: At the Point of the Hyphen

I want to review this history from a self-consciously socialist-feminist perspective; by which I mean both that I intend to highlight the centrality of a kind of politics I shall call 'socialist-feminism' to the history of woman suffrage, and that I will do so on the basis of a modern perspective which calls itself 'socialist-feminism'. The classic socialist account of the history of woman suffrage summarized above insists on the fundamental antagonism of feminism and socialism, and the necessity for women activists to choose one over the other. By contrast, contemporary socialist-feminists reside at the point of the hyphen, tolerating the tension between socialism and feminism and making of it a creative and powerful progressive politics.<sup>6</sup> The

<sup>4</sup> (cont.)

the United States, both Aileen Kraditor (*Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*, New York 1965) and William O'Neill (*Everyone Was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America*, Chicago 1969) follow this line of argument. Feminists such as Aleksandra Kollontai and Emma Goldman, advocates of sexual liberation, are commonly invoked as alternative heroines of women's emancipation to bourgeois suffrage leaders.

<sup>5</sup> Much modern socialist-feminist scholarship initially took this tack. See Marilyn Boxer and Jean Quataert, eds., *Socialist Women: European Socialist Feminism in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, New York City 1978. A summary of this argument can be found in Charnie Guettel, *Marxism and Feminism*, Toronto 1974.

<sup>6</sup> See Mary Bailey's 1979 characterization of the necessary tension in 'Marxism-Feminism' quoted in Rosalind Petchesky, 'Dissolving the Hyphen: A Report on Marxist Feminist Groups', in Zillah Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, New York 1979, p. 375. 'As Marxist-Feminists we straddle an uneasy horse. We have not worked out what this means, this hyphen . . . All too often, all this has meant is that we are Marxists to our feminist sisters and feminists to our Marxist brothers. The gravest danger facing us right now is that we will settle for this hyphen . . . as a self-explanation . . . a counter, a cipher, instead of a project . . . What intervenes in this relationship of two terms is desire, on every level. Hyphen as wish. We have heard its whisperings.'

politics I am calling 'socialist-feminism' has long been a self-aware wing of modern feminism, playing a major role in the women's liberation revival of the late 1960s, as well as providing the dominant perspective for much women's history scholarship since then.<sup>7</sup> While modern socialist-feminism is uniquely self-aware and self-defined, I believe that it is possible to trace such politics back at least to the mid nineteenth century and to argue that they have consistently been a radicalizing force in the larger history of feminism. This article can be read, therefore, as a contribution to the reconstitution of the socialist-feminist tradition, as part of a contest with other kinds of feminism for control over the meaning and political direction of the contemporary women's movement.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, it is addressed to a socialist audience, in the spirit of sisterhood and comradely education. I invite all readers to join me, in other words, in temporary suspension of unnecessary oppositions, at the point of the hyphen.

The course of this political reconstruction is as follows. I begin with a brief consideration of the origins of the woman-suffrage demand in conjunction with the revolutions of 1848, and its temporary disappearance in the conservative decades that followed. During these years, socialism itself was marked by hostility to women's rights. My primary focus, however, is on the 1890–1920 period, in which suffragism resurfaced and during which both socialism and feminism flourished as international, multi-tendency movements for social change. Under the category 'socialist-feminism', I examine two kinds of politics produced by the complex intersection of those movements: the women's movement within the Second International; and the independent left feminists, often called in those years 'militants', who were influenced by and sympathetic to socialism but remained independent of party discipline. Both groups led the way to the reinvigoration of the demand for woman suffrage in the early twentieth century. In other words, I argue that in the 1890–1920 period woman

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Karen V. Hansen and Ilene J. Philipson, eds., *Women, Class and the Feminist Imagination: A Socialist Feminist Reader*, New York 1990.

<sup>8</sup> The meaning of 'feminism' is highly contested, both by scholars and activists. See Karen Offen, 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach', and Nancy Cott and Ellen Carol DuBois, 'Responses', *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 1, and vol. 15, no. 1, 1989–90. In *The Grounding of American Feminism*, New Haven 1988, Nancy Cott argues that the term, which first appeared about 1900, should be reserved for the more modern ideological strains with which it was originally associated. Because I am trying to establish links between the present and the past, I have chosen to use the term 'feminism' in a broad sense, to mean a very large, long and complex tradition calling for the 'equality', 'elevation', or 'emancipation' of women, but often disagreeing within itself as to how to achieve that. In particular, I am using the term 'feminism' to describe a historical movement larger and more general than the demand for woman suffrage. Here and elsewhere, my work has concentrated on illuminating intellectually and advancing politically the 'left feminist' wing of that tradition. It has frequently been observed that the terms 'left' and 'right' translate to feminism with great difficulty. Nonetheless, I find the term 'left feminism' helpful, and therefore use it, albeit with imprecision. Steven C. Hause and Anne R. Kenney, (*Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic*, Princeton 1984) use the term to describe a wing of the late-nineteenth-century French movement. In this connection, I have found Richard Flacks's, *Making History: The Radical Tradition in American Life*, New York 1986, very useful; he defines 'left' to mean democratic movements for social change, a tradition which includes but is not limited to socialism.

suffrage was a 'left' or 'militant' demand, and that it reflected the existence and vigour of both the socialist and feminist movements.<sup>9</sup>

### Beginnings of the Woman Suffrage Movement

While the demand for woman suffrage was inspired by movements for universal manhood suffrage, the classical individualism that underlay the democratic tradition resisted the inclusion of women. Indeed, as modern feminist political theorists have demonstrated, the independent, virtuous citizen was entirely male in conception, with the labour of women, like that of servants, obscured by (though necessary to) the appearance of men's independence.<sup>10</sup> If individualism and independence were prerequisites for the safe exercise of the democratic franchise, women—the essence of dependence—could not conceivably be trusted (or rewarded) with the vote. Men represented their dependents as well as themselves; women, within the family, expressed themselves politically indirectly, through their husbands, fathers and brothers.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, extending the notion of political democracy to women required a distinct, feminist logic to challenge the conventional notions of gender and of the family underlying individualist thought. When women first began to advocate the idea of political equality, about mid century, it was a way to symbolize their desire for independence, especially from men and in particular with respect to the family. The demand for equal suffrage also represented women's concrete aspiration for political power, their desire to act in their own interests, and therefore the spectre that these might be antagonistic to men's. Underlying both the political and symbolic challenge of women voting was the ultimate feminist claim: that women's individuality was as fundamental as that of men. This assertion ran counter to widely held ideas that women's unique service to others formed the ethical and emotional core of the family, and therefore of society. Indeed, the conviction of women's essential selflessness was a necessary corollary to men's individualism, the means of reconciling the pre-eminence of the self-determining man with the requirements

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<sup>9</sup> See Meredith Tax, *The Rising of the Women. Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880-1917*, New York 1980, a study of the American movement for working-women's emancipation that coincided with the 1890-1920 suffrage movement. Tax traces a similar political dialectic, which she calls 'the united front of women'. 'Gradually a shape—a theme—emerged from the clay . . . I have called it the "united front of women", by which I mean the alliance, recurring through time in various forms, of women in the socialist movement, the labor movement, the national liberation movements, and the feminist movement. I am using the term 'united front' not in the catch-all sense of the 1930s, but as it is used currently, particularly in the Third World, to describe the coming together . . . for a goal of some magnitude that takes a considerable length of time to achieve' (pp. 13-14). While I do not use the same term as Tax, because I see more tension and conflict than the term 'united front' suggests, I agree with Tax's sense of the complex dialectic at work and its importance to the long history of feminist politics.

<sup>10</sup> See Pareman, 'Feminist Critiques'.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage. The Origins of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1860*, New York 1978, and 'Beyond the Compact of the Fathers: Equal Rights, Woman Suffrage and the US Constitution, 1820-1876', *Journal of American History*, vol. 74, no. 3, 1987.

of social order. Moreover, the emphasis on women's individuality implicitly undermined the idea of categorical sexual difference, because if women were not all the same as each other, neither were they as a class different from all men. As such, the demand for woman suffrage posed a radical challenge to the social organization of gender, faced great opposition from men of all political persuasions, and required a movement of women for its advance.

Although the term 'women's rights' reaches back to the 1790s (it can be found in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft) the specific demand for equal political rights for women dates from 1848. Between these two revolutionary years, the issue of 'women's rights' was an aspect of utopian socialism and focused on economic rights, especially for married women.<sup>2</sup> The demand for *political* equality for women surfaced mid century, connected to the rise of popular movements for universal suffrage for men. In Britain, the initial drive for woman suffrage came from women Chartists (themselves influenced by Owenites) who tried but failed to get woman suffrage included in the People's Charter. American Elizabeth Cady Stanton, visiting London in 1840, took the Chartist innovation back to the United States. In 1848, that year of international revolutions, she organized a convention in Seneca Falls, New York, to demand women's rights, most controversially 'the sacred right to the elective franchise'. The most forceful demand for woman suffrage came from France, where a small group of socialist women protested against the exclusion of women from the universal suffrage declared by the Provisional Government in March 1848. For their efforts, Pauline Roland and Jeanne Deroine were imprisoned in St Lazare. From jail they wrote to a women's-rights convention in Massachusetts: 'Sisters of America! Your socialist sisters of France are united with you in the vindication of the right of women to civil and political equality . . . only by the union of the working-classes of both sexes to organize labor, can be acquired, completely and pacifically, the civil and political equality of women and the social right for all.' American feminists proudly acknowledged their sorority with the French martyrs.<sup>3</sup> Despite adherence to ideologies that supported equality and democracy, most mid-nineteenth-century male socialists and democrats were reluctant (or worse) to support women's demands for political equality. Yet this did not endear the women's-rights programme to conservatives. On the contrary, they identified women's rights with socialism and fought it on that basis. In the aftermath of 1848 women were a particular target of political repression, and their political activities were criminalized. In Germany's northern states women were barred from membership of political clubs from 1850 until 1908; in France the prohibition against women's political activism stood until the establishment of the Third Republic.<sup>4</sup> This association of

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joselyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* Volume 1, New York 1883, pp. 234-36; Ellen Carol DuBois, ed., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writings, Speeches*, New York 1981; Claire Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Moses. See also Ruth-Ellen Joeres and Mary Jo Maynes, eds., *German Women in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Indiana 1986.

women's political activism with threats to bourgeois social order is itself important testimony to the radical quality of woman suffrage. Similar repressions took place in China in 1914 and Argentina in 1945.<sup>15</sup>

#### After 1848: 'Left-Wing Patriarchalism'

The socialist movement and the men who led it were a party to the anti-feminism that followed the defeats of 1848. The next two decades were the heyday of what Claire Moses has called 'left-wing patriarchalism'.<sup>16</sup> In France, Proudhon rebuilt the working-class movement around nostalgia for the male-dominated artisan family. Lasalle played a similar role in Germany. Indeed, it is this context that helps us understand the reputation that Marx, Engels and Bebel achieved among socialists as relatively strong advocates of sexual equality. As for the principle of equal rights for women, the 1848 era left the shallow imprint of formal support, which was virtually emptied of content in the years that followed. In the 1875 Gotha Programme that formed the German Social Democratic Party, for instance, a plank calling for suffrage for 'citizens of both sexes', proposed by Bebel, was defeated in favour of the deliberately vague 'general equal and direct suffrage... for citizens over 20 years of age'.<sup>17</sup> While later male socialist leaders never equalled the misogyny of this period, it left its legacy in the stubborn conviction that women were themselves to blame for socialists' reluctance to support woman suffrage, and that the enfranchisement of women would only strengthen the forces of reaction. Women working within the socialist tradition regularly confronted and challenged this hostile undercurrent.

For the most part, the demand for political equality for women faded between 1848 and 1890. In the United States and Britain there were brief resurgences of woman suffragism in connection with the expansion of manhood suffrage in the late 1860s. In the USA, the constitutional abolition of slavery and enfranchisement of the freedmen inspired woman suffragists to work for the constitutional recognition of woman suffrage as well. In Britain, the Reform Act of 1867 encouraged feminists who had previously concerned themselves with education and employment to shift their attention to political rights, and to prevail on John Stuart Mill to sponsor a bill to include women in its provisions. (It is interesting that in both the US and British cases, these early efforts were not aimed at enfranchising women as a particular group, but rather at *removing* the linguistic qualifier 'male' to enable the inclusion of women in non-gendered categories such as 'person', 'citizen' or 'voter'.) Woman-suffrage activism was once again a casualty of the repression of radicalism in the wake of the

<sup>15</sup> Ono Kazuko, *Chinese Women in a Century of Revolution, 1850-1950*, California 1989. Cynthia Jeffress Little, 'Education, Philanthropy and Feminism: Components of Argentine Womanhood, 1869-1926', in Asunción Lavrin, ed., *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives*, Greenwood, Conn. 1978. A lone but intriguing counter-example can be found in England, where the prohibition against paid partisan organizing in 1883 opened the doors of political support work to women.

<sup>16</sup> Moses, p. 152.

<sup>17</sup> Thönnesson, pp. 31-2.



Paris Commune and the intensified fear of revolution that followed it. In the United States, for instance, the post-Civil War effort for woman suffrage came to a spectacular halt in the controversy surrounding the socialist-feminist Victoria Woodhull, woman-suffrage advocate, free-love pioneer, and the first publisher of *The Communist Manifesto* in the United States. In Britain, suffragism languished during the Tory ascendancy of the 1870s.

Without a thriving socialist Left, feminism in the 1870s and 1880s was pulled to the right, toward campaigns for education and away from political power, toward claims of moral superiority and away from equal rights, toward middle-class women's traditions of charitable benevolence and away from working women's aspirations to self-support. In particular, the demand for political power for women shrivelled into various 'partial' suffrages that bore little relation to the radical, feminist tradition of absolute equality with men. In Britain, Sweden, parts of Australia and the United States, Finland and elsewhere, property-owning or taxpaying women were granted local suffrages. This was usually a modification of an older tradition whereby women who owned property were granted 'proxy' voting rights, to be exercised for them by men of their choosing.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the holding of property was itself infused with the relations of gender. In most cases, married women were categorically denied all property rights. Thus 'propertied women' was a marital as well as a class category: even more than the class status of the men who were their husbands, the fact that they were married denied most women access to property and the suffrages attached to them. In Britain, parliamentary traditions were so strong that the woman-suffrage movement did not entirely disappear in these years; it was nonetheless timid and conservative and forfeited the basic demand for full political equality with men. The handful of feminists who worked for political rights in the 1870s and early 1880s asked only for parliamentary suffrage for 'spinsters and widows', yielding to the framework of coverture that declared that married (that is, most) women were 'represented' in and by their husbands.

Individual women who continued to subscribe to the radical suffragist tradition of full political equality for women on the same terms as men were very much isolated from the feminist mainstream in the 1870s and 1880s. Janus-like, they looked backward to 1848 and forward to the socialist and feminist revivals of the 1890s, but their continued agitation for woman suffrage was a lonely and alienating crusade. In the United States, Elizabeth Stanton played this role; in Britain, it was Elizabeth Wolstoneholme-Elmy. In France, Hubertine Auclert represented the democratic feminist tradition, while in Italy it was Anna Mozzoni.<sup>19</sup> These premature socialist-feminists tended to

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<sup>18</sup> Paulson, p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> In 1879 Auclert petitioned socialists to support woman suffrage and forge 'a pact of alliance against our common oppressors' Hause and Kenney, p. 9. After years of alliance with liberals, Mozzoni 'began calling herself a "socialist"', and saw new possibilities for a woman suffrage movement in 'the young female factory workers of the Italian textile industry'. Donald Meyer, *Sex and Power: The Rise of Women in America, Russia, Sweden and Italy*, Middletown, Conn. 1987, pp. 124-5.

link the enfranchisement of women with the emancipation of the working class, and began to identify themselves with socialism, which rarely returned the favour.<sup>20</sup> The grand historical transformation which underlay the convergence between their faith in the democratic promise of woman suffrage and a growing interest in socialism was the rise of a female waged-labour force and their recognition that wage-earning women would eventually form the core of a radical feminist revival; for the time being, however, male socialist leaders' older, anti-feminist habits of hostility to women workers continued unabated. 'As long as capitalism continues to rule,' German Social Democrats insisted in 1873, 'we have an obligation to strive to keep women and children out of bourgeois industry altogether, both in the interests of the women and children themselves, and in the interests of the proletariat in general.'<sup>21</sup>

If we are to find any feminist strains within socialist movements before 1890, they will not be in the classic centres of socialist politics—in the cities and among waged workers—but in more rural areas and among family-oriented women. In the American west, Scandinavia, Australia and elsewhere, left-leaning, quasi-socialist movements gave women room to voice their support for various 'moral reforms', especially in campaigns against alcohol and prostitution. Inasmuch as such protests opposed forms of commerce they considered immoral, their moral demands had a political, state-oriented side as well. In the United States, Australia and New Zealand, for instance, women's moral reform movements called for women to be allowed to vote on special matters of moral significance—to control alcohol, criminalize prostitution, or shape the moral content of public-school education.<sup>22</sup> Like propertied suffrages, these partial franchises need to be distinguished from the democratic feminist tradition of full political equality with men. Yet they have contributed to the reputation of woman suffrage as a conservative movement—because they run contrary to traditions of personal liberty, involve an increase of state power over individual behaviour, and seem so foreign to our modern attitudes to pleasure.

To the degree that these moral reform movements were conservative, however, so were some of the roots of social democracy, with which they frequently converged. For instance, in the United States, Mari Jo Buhle has demonstrated that the moralistic, populist politics of the Midwest helped to build an American socialist movement, and that in the 1880s, the Women's Christian Temperance Union was virtually a conduit for women into socialism.<sup>23</sup> Paulson argues that similar

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<sup>20</sup> Thus Elizabeth Stanton, in her closing address to the International Council of Women in 1888, predicted that unless women's demands for freedom were speedily met, 'it requires no prophet to foretell the revolution ahead when women strike hands with Nihilists, Socialists, Communists, and Anarchists, in defense of the most enlarged liberties of the people.' DuBois, ed., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony*, p. 177.

<sup>21</sup> Thonnesson, p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> In contrast to property-bound traditions of votes for women, these movements were more likely to restrict their demands to married rather than to unmarried women.

<sup>23</sup> Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920*, Illinois 1981. Ella Reeve Bloor, legendary founder of the CPUSA, made her political start in the WCTU.

patterns held for the states of Australia. Indeed, the Victorian, traditionalist perspective of moral reform movements on sex roles and the family was welcomed by socialists as a way to reinforce domestic peace in the working-class family. Bonnie Smith observes that one of the barriers to full support for sexual equality within socialist movements was that it raised 'questions concerning the working-class family', and 'questioning the working-class home ultimately amounted to questioning the backbone of socialism—the working-class male.'<sup>24</sup>

## Women in the Second International

Beginning about 1890, an openly and aggressively feminist movement began to develop within international socialism, with political equality one of its most consistent demands. The largest socialist women's movements were in Germany, the United States and Austria, but there was also activity in Italy, France, Russia, all of Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Australia, Ireland, South Africa, Galicia, Argentina, and undoubtedly elsewhere, constituting what was arguably the largest international feminist movement ever.<sup>25</sup>

The figure most identified with this international socialist women's effusion was Clara Zetkin, the leading woman in the leading party of the Second International. At the founding conference of the Second International, in Paris in 1889, Zetkin caused a sensation by condemning the antagonism to working women that had prevailed for so long in socialist circles. 'If we wish women to be free human beings, to have the same rights as men in our society,' she insisted, 'women's work must be neither abolished nor limited except in certain quite isolated cases.'<sup>26</sup> Through the 1890s, Zetkin forged a socialist women's programme and practice within the German Social Democratic Party which became the prototype for women in socialist parties around the world.<sup>27</sup> From 1907 to 1915, the size and vigour of

<sup>24</sup> Bonnie Smith, *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700*, Lexington, Mass. 1989, p. 313.

<sup>25</sup> Boxer and Quataert; Richard Evans, *The Feminists*, New York 1977; and *Comrades and Sisters. Feminism, Socialism and Pacifism in Europe, 1870–1945*, New York 1987, Charles Sowerwine, 'The Socialist Women's Movement From 1850 to 1940', in Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, Boston 1987; Jane Slaughter and Robert Kern, eds., *European Women on the Left: Socialism, Feminism and the Problems Faced by Political Women, 1880–Present*, Westport, Conn. 1981.

<sup>26</sup> Susan Groag Bell and Karen M. Offen, eds., *Women, the Family and Freedom: The Debate in Documents* Volume 2, Stanford 1983, p. 87.

<sup>27</sup> Cynthia Little has found evidence of a socialist women's organization in Argentina, the Feminist Center, working from 1906 through 1912 with socialist deputy Alfredo Palacios, advocating the Second International feminist platform, including woman suffrage and special labour legislation for women. 'Education, Philanthropy, and Feminism. Components of Argentine Womanhood, 1860–1926' in Lavrin, ed., *Latin American Women: Historic Perspectives*. On Second International feminism in South Africa, see Cheryll Walker, *The Woman's Suffrage Movement in South Africa*, Capetown 1979; this was, of course, an all-white movement. On Galicia, see Martha Boyachevsky-Chomiak, 'Socialism and Feminism: The First Stages of Women's Organizations in the Eastern Part of the Austrian Empire', in Tova Yedlin, ed., *Women in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, Ottawa 1975.

this worldwide socialist women's network made possible a sort of shadow women's International, with annual conferences. The Women's History Week that American feminists now celebrate in March is the lineal descendent of the International Proletarian Women's Day first authorized by the 1910 international socialist women's conference.<sup>28</sup>

The socialist women's movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was situated exactly between the male-dominated left and bourgeois feminism. Most accounts of these embattled socialist-feminists emphasize either their struggles with the sexism of male socialists or their challenge to middle-class women's movements, but it was really the balance they struck, always fragile and often upset, between these two political forces that determined their political environment.<sup>29</sup> In several of the leading parties the tension between socialism and feminism led to open conflict between socialist women themselves. Among German socialist women, for instance, Zetkin's loyalty to international socialism was counterposed to (and balanced by) Lily Braun's greater inclination to the independent women's movement. There were similar sororal antagonists in the French party—Elizabeth Renaud and Louise Saumoneau (who 'came to socialism on the rebound from feminism') and in Italy between Annas Kuliskoff and Mozzoni.<sup>30</sup> But eschewing the continuing temptation to choose sides, to designate one position alone as correct, the fierce battles between them can be read as an expression of the dialectical situation of socialist-feminism, the shifting and unstable but distinct and authentic political territory it occupied.

The issue of woman suffrage was at the very centre—was the virtual expression—of the balance socialist women struck between the non-socialist women's movement and the male-dominated socialist Left. Had they not forced their perspective forward within their parties, woman suffrage would have languished as a principle tainted by socialism but not really sustained by it. On the other hand, it is not an overstatement to say that had it not been for the degree of autonomy socialist women were able to sustain within their parties from the mid 1890s on, and for the new classes of women to whom they brought the issue, the demand for woman suffrage probably would not have been revived and placed at the centre of a militant, mass, modern women's movement.

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<sup>28</sup> Socialist Women's Day seems to have begun in the United States in 1909, as part of the International-authorized socialist campaign for woman suffrage (Tax, *Running of the Women*, p. 188). Zetkin picked it up within the International in 1910. The holiday was adopted by the Comintern and became a solely Communist observance, until the American women's liberation movement, itself inspired by Communist women activists in the 1960s, reimported the celebration to the United States. By the late 1970s, liberal Democrats took the holiday through one more political transformation, and it became the federally mandated Women's History Week. See Temma Kaplan, 'On the Socialist Origins of International Women's Day', *Feminist Studies*, II, 1983, for the history of this event, a rich example of the complex relation between the present and the past in the creation of a historical tradition.

<sup>29</sup> Buhle's first account of American socialist women emphasized left sexism: 'Women and the Socialist Party, 1901-1914', *Radical America*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1970; the collection edited by Boxer and Quataert, *Socialist Women*, stresses the antagonism to bourgeois feminists.

<sup>30</sup> Sowerwine, p. 409.

Zetkin first succeeded in getting the German party to adopt the explicit endorsement of political rights 'without distinction of sex' into its platform in 1891, at the Erfurt conference. To the wearying objection of socialist men that women were too reactionary to risk enfranchising, Zetkin responded that the vote 'was a means to assemble the masses, to organize and educate them', and that it was precisely political organizing, including working for the vote, that would 'educate' women out of whatever relative 'backwardness' they suffered.<sup>31</sup> Within the International, the first pro-suffrage resolution was passed in 1900, but the Belgian party in 1904 and the Austrian party in 1906 continued to set aside demands for woman suffrage in order to concentrate on universal manhood suffrage. The campaign led by Zetkin, to reprimand the Belgians and the Austrians and to strengthen organized socialism's commitment to woman suffrage, coincided with the first all-women international socialist conference, at Stuttgart in 1907. There the International accepted the principle that political equality for women was a non-contingent, fundamental demand that socialist parties must pursue 'strenuously'.<sup>32</sup>

Women working from within socialist parties liked to argue that the bourgeois case for woman suffrage was a defence of property and individual privilege, while they demanded the vote as a weapon of working-class power and on the basis of fundamentally different presumptions. The issue of property restrictions on proposals for woman suffrage played a major role, first in socialist men's opposition to woman suffrage and then in socialist women's sense of what distinguished them from bourgeois feminists. However, the situation was more complicated, and easy ideological distinctions did not always hold up. It is particularly important to note that property-holding among women was usually related not only to wealth but to marital and professional status. This was certainly the case in Britain, where the legal concept of coverture was invented. The 1884 Reform Act expanded the male franchise from property-holders to householders. Even though suffragists demonstrated that extending the householder vote to women would disproportionately benefit the working class, leaders of the Social Democratic Federation contended that anything less than universal womanhood suffrage was a compromise of socialist principles. (Zetkin supported their view.) Even in Germany, where the distinction between bourgeois and socialist cases for woman suffrage was forged, non-socialist suffragists were deeply divided over the issue of property restrictions, with the most venerable figures in the movement dedicated to universal womanhood suffrage.<sup>33</sup>

It was not their objections to enfranchising women on a propertied basis, or the allegedly collectivist case they alone made for the vote, that really distinguished socialist women's suffragism from the bourgeois variant, but the link they made between women workers and

<sup>31</sup> Jean Quataert, *Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917*, Princeton 1979, p. 94.

<sup>32</sup> 'The socialist parties of all countries have a duty to struggle energetically for the introduction of universal suffrage for women' Sowerwine, p. 416.

<sup>33</sup> Evans, *The Feminists*, pp. 109-12.

political equality. The distinctively socialist argument for woman suffrage, which came to be widely accepted among bourgeois suffragists as well, rested on the recognition that the increasingly public character of women's labour had to be matched with an equally public political role.<sup>34</sup> 'The demand for woman suffrage results from the economic and social revolutions provoked by the capitalist mode of production,' resolved a socialist women's conference in 1904, 'but in particular from the revolutionary change in labor and the status and consciousness of women.'<sup>35</sup> Thus, substantive support for woman suffrage within socialism required overcoming the powerful heritage of male hostility to wage-earning women. That this occurred was a tribute to the feminist insurgency within the Second International and meant that, in the future, it would be much more difficult 'to dismiss the female proletariat as a force impeding the revolution'.<sup>36</sup> The tradition of 'proletarian sexism' left its mark, however, in the policy of special regulation of women workers, offered as protection for the most vulnerable in the labour market but actually functioning to keep women in a separate and unequal sector of the labour force.<sup>37</sup> The operative word here was 'protection', a rhetorical device which facilitated a reinterpretation of such laws, from hostile to friendly towards women workers. Through the 1880s, laws to regulate only women workers were advocated in the male-dominated trade unions and socialist movements. Into the 1890s such legislation was opposed by feminists, both by those who objected to all state regulation of the wage relation and by those who accepted the necessity of labour legislation but called for its application to all workers, not just women.<sup>38</sup> In the complex interactions that generated feminism within the Second International, support for sex-based labour legislation seems to have been the price paid for substantive support for woman suffrage. Zetkin, who had attacked special restrictions on working women at Stuttgart in 1889, changed her position in 1893, after which time she faithfully advocated special labour legislation for women. All women who remained within socialist parties accepted the principle of special labour laws for women, and through this route the notion worked its way into the women's movement proper, where it lodged until the mid twentieth century.

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<sup>34</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose historical account of women's evolution toward emancipation is indistinguishable from that of Engels, was a major force in popularizing the socialist approach to women's equality throughout the non-socialist women's movement in America. Buhle, *Women in American Socialism*, ch. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Thonnesson, p. 63.

<sup>36</sup> Linda Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917*, London 1984.

<sup>37</sup> In her survey of the history of women workers, Alice Kessler-Harris concludes that this is the way that special labour legislation for women ultimately functioned. *Out To Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, Oxford 1982, ch. 7. In her later work, she has backed away from this assessment to some degree, see *A Woman's Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences*, Lexington, Kentucky 1989.

<sup>38</sup> In England, the conflict between these two positions occurred early in the history of the Fabian Society, over the 1896 Factory Act. Socialist-feminists, among them Stanton's daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch, criticized the limitation of hours only among women workers, while Beatrice Webb, representing the classic trade-union position and the leading faction within the Fabians, argued (successfully) for laws against the exploitation of women workers. Polly Beale, 'Fabian Feminism' *Gender, Politics and Culture in London, 1880-1930*, Ph.D. thesis, Rutgers University, 1989.

## Countering 'Bourgeois Feminism'

Organizationally, the intermediate position of feminists within socialism led to the twin principles of autonomy for women's organizing in socialist parties, and antagonism to collaboration with non-socialist feminists. Of these, hostility to bourgeois feminism was the more intensely expressed, perhaps because the efforts of non-socialist women represented such serious competition. The initial impetus for the international socialist movement to organize women in the 1890s, after decades of inactivity, was the necessity of countering the organizational inroads that non-socialist women were making among female wage earners. In the United States, for instance, middle-class feminists successfully established 'working girls' clubs' in major cities in the 1880s. In Germany, a working-women's movement was beginning to flourish without middle-class leadership but outside of the SPD as well.<sup>39</sup> Barbara Clements argues that the great Russian socialist Aleksandria Kollontai was drawn to the organizing of working women and to feminist issues by the fear that the bourgeois women's movement was becoming too influential among working-class women.<sup>40</sup>

In 1896, Zetkin made hostility to the non-socialist women's movement a fundamental principle of socialist women's organizing in Germany. (Earlier there was little threat—or inspiring competition—from bourgeois women activists: Bebel did not object to 'collaboration'.) The socialist programme for women's emancipation included woman suffrage, equal education, freedom of occupation, equal status in domestic law, equal pay for equal work, abolition of domestic service, and protective labour legislation for women workers. The non-socialist women's movement supported all but the last two, and, as we have seen, only the issue of protective labour legislation was really significant. Despite the fact that their programmes were largely the same, Zetkin argued fiercely against any collaboration between women in the 'proletarian' and 'bourgeois' movements and struggled constantly (if futilely) to draw the line between the two. In 1907 at Stuttgart, Zetkin overcame strong opposition from the Austrians, British, French and Americans to establish non-cooperation with bourgeois feminists as the official policy for socialist women around the world. Like the concessions that Zetkin and other socialist women made to sex-based labour legislation, anti-collaborationism helped to offset the innovation that strong support for woman suffrage from a socialist platform represented. Anti-collaborationism was more important rhetorically than organizationally, and was honoured as frequently in the breach as in the observance. In the USA, socialist women kept their sectarian distance from their 'enemy sisters' only in New York City;

<sup>39</sup> Mari Jo Buhle is currently studying American working women's associations in the 1880s. On Germany, see Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, New York 1989.

<sup>40</sup> B. Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandria Kollontai*, London 1979, p. 59. Similarly, Linda Edmonson, in *Feminism in Russia, 1900-1917*, argues that 'such was the abhorrence felt by Orthodox Marxists toward the idea of separate women's organizations that the potential value of the female proletariat went almost unnoticed' until the non-bourgeois women's movement forced it upon socialists' attention (p. 171).

everywhere else there was considerable cooperation throughout the 1910s, especially around votes for women.<sup>41</sup>

Although Zetkin's rhetorical challenges were directed at bourgeois feminists, she also fought to keep socialist women from being overwhelmed by men's definition of socialism. In structural terms, this commitment to autonomy within socialism was expressed by organizing women separately from men within the party, a corollary to the practice of organizing them separately from the non-socialist women's movement. The most vigorous and powerful of the national movements—in the United States, Austria, Finland—followed the lead of the Germans and organized women separately from men.<sup>42</sup> To be sure, in Germany this strategy was dictated by the Anti-Association Laws which prohibited women from engaging in political activities.<sup>43</sup> (By definition, an all-women's organization could not be political.) But the separate organization of women within socialism served an enormously important positive function as well, making it possible to set up the infrastructure of a semi-autonomous women's movement, and to nurture an entire generation of socialist women leaders. In 1908, the repeal of the German Anti-Association Laws led the leaders of the SPD to abolish separate women's organization. Zetkin fought furiously against this action, which she felt would lead to women's eventual disempowerment within German socialism, but she lost, and her own power within the SPD declined.

Charles Sowerwine emphasizes the importance of the separate organization of women to their power within socialist parties, by contrasting the strength of German women socialists with the weakness of women in the French party. The French Groupe Feministe Socialiste (organized in 1899) never undertook the separate organization of women in the party (as a consequence of a sectarian split of the organization which separated the feminist and socialist impulses within it). A similar situation occurred in Italy. Perhaps the absence of semi-autonomous socialist women's movements is one of the reasons why woman suffrage did not come to either country after the war. Despite the fact that the socialist parties in both countries formally supported woman suffrage as a parliamentary measure, and that, at least in France, there was a non-socialist woman-suffrage movement of some size, the absence of a link between the two—those divided and inconsistent feminists within the socialist parties—may well have been crucial. Finland serves as a fitting counter-example. There the SPD was unusually hospitable to feminists within the party, and a large socialist women's network developed, which played a major role in the first victory for woman suffrage in the western world, in 1906.

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<sup>41</sup> John D. Buenker, 'The Politics of Mutual Frustration: Socialists and Suffragists in New York and Wisconsin', in Sally Miller, ed., *Planned Liberation: Socialism and Feminism*, Westport, Conn. 1981.

<sup>42</sup> In the United States, socialist women had their own organization, the Socialist Women's National Union, even before Debs formed the American party in 1902; in 1908 it metamorphosed into the Women's National Committee of the SPUSA.

<sup>43</sup> Kollontai's biographer says that when Kollontai discovered that the separate organizing of socialist women, to which she was passionately committed in Russia, was the child of German necessity, she was astonished. Clements, p. 64.



## Independent Suffrage Militancy

The emergence of a newly militant suffragism, influenced by the upsurge of socialist politics after 1890 but ideologically and organizationally independent of it, is the other source for the great growth of the woman-suffrage movement internationally in the early twentieth century. While feminists within socialist parties prepared the way for a wage-earners' suffragism that helped make woman suffrage a mass movement, these independent feminists made their contribution to the revival of suffragism by linking it to a fundamental challenge to gender definitions and relations, and adding a whole new level of tactical militancy to suffrage agitation. Like socialism, this independent feminist militancy was decidedly internationalist, both in spirit and in substance. In Europe, North America, Australia—but also in China, South America and elsewhere—the balance of forces between these two types of feminist radicals, some within socialist parties and others outside, shaped the existence, strength and outcome of the women's movement for political equality in the years prior to World War I.

This independent militant suffragism—whose advocates came to be known as 'suffragettes'—radiated out from Britain, where it flourished in the early twentieth century. The British suffragettes are one of the few aspects of the international woman-suffrage movement that have entered general historical consciousness, but study of them has, until recently, been limited largely to the complex and contradictory Pankhurst family. However, a new generation of historians of women is offering a revisionist interpretation of the history of suffrage militancy in Britain which better allows us to appreciate its links with the Left. They emphasize that the radicalization of the movement in Britain reached far beyond the Pankhurst family; that its roots lay in the organization of working-class women and the dedication of activists inspired by but independent of organized socialism; and that the mainstream of British suffragism eventually established a political alliance with Labour.<sup>44</sup>

Jill Liddington and Jill Norris have demonstrated that the militant revival of British suffragism predates the involvement of the Pankhursts and can be traced to a working-class-based suffrage movement of Lancashire textile workers in the 1890s. Why were British working women so political? While the British trade unions were as hostile to working women as their French or German equivalents, British working women had their own organizations, including the Women's Trade Union League (formed in 1874), the Women's Cooperative Guild (formed in 1883), and the overwhelmingly female textile workers'

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<sup>44</sup> Sandra Holton, *Feminism and Democracy. Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900–1918*, New York 1986; Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement*, London 1978; Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907–1914*, London 1988. In addition, there is another group of contemporary feminist historians of British suffragism who have emphasized instead the sexual politics—as anticipating modern anti-pornography feminism—especially in Christabel Pankhurst's leadership. See Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860–1914*, Princeton 1987; and Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880–1930*, London 1985.

unions. Middle-class suffragists with socialist inclinations turned to the working-class women of these organizations to generate a working-women's suffrage movement. In Manchester, Esther Roper and her companion, Eva Gore Booth, sister of the Irish nationalist leader Constance Markievitch, took the lead. The tactics of this new kind of suffragism were borrowed from trade unionism, and emphasized 'open-air campaigning, factory-gate meetings and street corner speaking'.<sup>45</sup> Politically, its goal was to pressure the fledgling Labour Party to provide a parliamentary route for woman suffrage.

In 1900, Gore Booth took on, as her protégé, Christabel Pankhurst, daughter of ILP founders Richard and Emmeline Pankhurst. Following the lead of Roper and Gore Booth, Christabel and her mother formed the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. The Pankhursts initially emphasized public agitation, working-class organization and Labour Party political links. They were especially close to Keir Hardie, and in 1906 campaigned aggressively for him. By then, in the words of her sister, Christabel had 'lost all interest' in the women of the Lancashire textile unions, and the WSPU moved its operations from Manchester to London.<sup>46</sup> Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst kept a close hold on the leadership of the WSPU, which remained a small, essentially cadre-type organization. As a result, other groups of militants split off into their own societies. These included the Women's Freedom League, every bit as daring tactically as the WSPU, and the East End Federation, organized by Sylvia Pankhurst among working-class women. In its first years in London, the WSPU concentrated on organizing mass public demonstrations, the likes of which had never been seen in any women-led movement. As the Pankhursts shifted their tactics to civil disobedience, other British suffrage societies, including the once conventional National Union of Woman Suffrage Societies, continued the organization of these 'monster demonstrations' for suffrage. By 1911, militant modern tactics under various organizational labels dominated the British suffrage movement.

The Pankhursts learned their radicalism not only from the trade unions but from Irish nationalists as well.<sup>47</sup> From Irish radicals, the WSPU discovered the necessity of taking a confrontational stance toward the increasingly complacent Liberal Party. From the 'political law-breaking' tradition of Irish nationalism, it developed its own highly influential form of civil disobedience.<sup>48</sup> The WSPU began by disrupting Parliament and throwing stones. As Richard Evans

<sup>45</sup> Holton, p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement. An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals*, London 1977, p. 195.

<sup>47</sup> Australian suffragists expressed the general link between nationalism and the radical feminism of militant suffragettes in the association of their own cause, 'the case of the small nation of women', with other 'claims of small nations to self government'. Ida H. Harper, ed., *History of Women Suffrage* Volume 6, New York 1922, p. 753.

<sup>48</sup> Rosemary Callen Owens, *Smashing Times: A History of the Irish Woman Suffrage Movement 1889-1922*, Dublin 1984, p. 40. Christabel Pankhurst, referring in 1908 to the 'Fenian outrages in Manchester and the blowing up of Clerkenwell Gaol', wondered 'how anybody after that can say that militant methods are not effectual' Jane Marcus, ed., *Suffrage and the Pankhursts*, London 1987, p. 48.

observes, 'the use of civil disobedience,' for which the WSPU became internationally notorious, 'owed more to the example of nationalism than to socialism.'<sup>49</sup> It seems highly likely that Gandhi, who was in London during the early WSPU years, drew satyagraha in part from the Pankhursts' example.<sup>50</sup> (Any notions of women's inherent pacifism should be laid to rest by the fact that the principled non-violence of this tradition came from the Indian movement, not the feminist.) As the WSPU moved away from Manchester and from its working-class origins, this civil-disobedient strain took on a more and more violent air, culminating in firebombs and martyrdom on the part of the suffragettes and punitive force-feeding on the part of the state. Holton argues that the shift from mass to illegal tactics alienated many working-class women, who expressed their suffragism at giant demonstrations rather than in prison, but the political theatre of arrests and force-feedings intensified women's militancy around the world.

### The 'Suffragettes': A Modern Mass Movement

The British press quickly labelled the new feminist militants 'suffragettes', a term which came to stand around the world for a fundamentally modern and mass approach to building a woman-suffrage movement. The term 'suffragette' conjured up radical challenges to dominant definitions of womanhood. Whereas bourgeois femininity—in Europe, North America, and their cultural outlands—was marked by a devotion to the separation of the domestic and private world of women and the public and political world of men, suffragette militancy literally took women out of the parlour and into the streets. Parades, outdoor demonstrations, street-corner meetings—these were the marks of modern suffrage agitation. Inasmuch as wage-earning women provided the female army that first breached the walls around the public realm, suffragette militancy was initially 'viewed as a specifically working-class initiative'. But the challenge to cloistered femininity that it expressed eventually drew passion from women of all classes.<sup>51</sup> Suffragettes were eager to demonstrate their support in public, willing to break the law in service to 'The Cause'. Some were even determined to die as martyrs for votes for women (only successful, it seems, in Britain).

Like their pioneering role in mass suffrage demonstrations, the Pankhursts inaugurated and then abandoned to other British suffragists the strategy of pressuring the Labour Party to support woman suffrage. At the turn of the century, male suffrage was still limited to 'householders', and the Labour Party clung to the position (reinforced by the dictates of the Second International) that the only enfranchisement it would support was the expansion of the suffrage to all adults of both sexes. About the same time as it shifted from Manchester to London, from mass demonstrations to civil disobedience, and

<sup>49</sup> Evans, *The Feminists*, p. 190.

<sup>50</sup> Paulson, p. 155.

<sup>51</sup> Holton, p. 35; Ellen Carol DuBois, 'Working Women, Class Relations and Suffrage Militance: Harriot Stanton Blatch and the New York Woman Suffrage Movement, 1894-1907', *Journal of American History*, vol. 74, no. 1, 1987.

from a working-class base to elite cadre, the WSPU repudiated Labour as a lost cause and started to move to the right. Meanwhile, the National Union of Woman Suffrage Societies turned to the left to take up the path that the Pankhursts had pioneered, that of hammering away at Labour's objections to woman suffrage. In 1911, this persistence was rewarded by Labour's agreement to support a compromise bill, which set the level of female enfranchisement at an intermediate position. The bill failed when Liberals deserted it, but the detente between suffrage and Labour held firm.

I emphasize this to clarify that, at least in Britain and possibly elsewhere, the issue of limits on woman suffrage ceased to be a dividing line, certainly between socialist and non-socialist suffragists, several years before women were enfranchised. When a wartime coalition government finally began to enact parliamentary suffrage in Britain in 1918, only women householders and wives of male householders over thirty got the vote, a restriction designed solely to keep women from being the majority of the electorate. After 1918, the only women who could not vote were those under thirty and not householders or their wives—in other words, single wage-earning women. Thus, the age limitation was more restrictive in class terms than the householder status, but the suffrage movement was far more concerned than Labour and continued to battle for the inclusion of these women. The enfranchisement of women on equal terms with men—for whom householder limitations had been *abolished* in 1918—came relatively late to Britain, in 1928.

The example of the British suffragettes had tremendous international influence, attributable to the extensive worldwide publicity they received (which they intentionally elicited) and the movement's coincidence with other political radicalisms, socialist and/or nationalist. The International Woman Suffrage Association, established between 1899 and 1902, also spread the example of the suffragettes. It provided a conduit for their influence, much as the Second International did for the socialist suffragism of Zetkin and Kollontai. The relation of the IWSA to the Second International is an interesting one, combining imitation and competition, and signifying the complex interaction between suffragettes and socialists in the international reinvigoration of the movement for political equality. Whereas an earlier international organization of bourgeois women reformers (the International Council of Women, formed in 1888) had avoided the issue of woman suffrage as too radical, the rise of international socialism had emboldened non-socialist suffragists, who now formed their own international society. But the IWSA also helped bourgeois suffragists to compete with socialists, by providing them with an international resource to counter the influence of socialists in the suffrage politics of their home countries.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Evans, 'Appendix International Feminist Movements', in *The Feminists*; Edith F. Hurwitz, 'The International Sisterhood', in Bridenthall, Koontz and Suard, eds., *Becoming Visible*; Mineke Bosch and Annemarie Klooserterman, eds., *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1902-1942*, Ohio 1990.

## A Feminist International

The IWSA was formed a few years before suffragettes appeared on the British scene. Because of organizational factionalism in Britain, the WSPU was prevented by other British suffrage organizations from joining the international association, but the attempt to exclude their example was to no avail. In 1906 the IWSA met in Copenhagen, and delegates brought back the news of the British militants to Hungary, Russia, and elsewhere. The IWSA had been designed to meet every five years, but it soon found itself meeting much more frequently, infused despite itself with the spirit of suffragette militancy.<sup>33</sup> In 1909 the IWSA met in London, and delegates were treated to various demonstrations of militant tactics—mass marches, civil disobedience, hunger strikes. Although British suffragettes were not formally invited to the 1913 meetings in Budapest, a radical faction of the Hungarian movement brought Sylvia Pankhurst to talk about her working-class-based version of militancy. She also lectured in Brussels and Vienna, though police prohibited her from holding meetings in Berlin and Dresden.<sup>34</sup> Women of the Second International, who had helped to inspire the formation of the IWSA by their example, were in turn much influenced by the feminist militancy it spread. Despite their oft-repeated opposition to 'collaboration' with 'bourgeois suffragists', they could not resist the energy of the suffragette example: Richard Evans believes that the mass demonstrations of International Proletariat Women's Day from 1911 through 1913 were imitations of the 'monster parades' organized by British militants.<sup>35</sup>

A new generation of American suffragists—college-educated, middle-class women bored by the 'pink parlor teas' of the ageing suffrage establishment—were especially quick to pick up the inspiration of the British militants. Many of them were influenced by and sympathetic to socialism, although not party members. In San Francisco, trade-union activist Maud Younger ('the millionaire waitress') organized the Working Women's Suffrage Society. In Manhattan, a group called the 'American Suffragettes' began to hold outdoor meetings every night and to tease the press with their love of the outrageous. Harriot Stanton Blatch, herself a veteran of British Fabianism in the 1890s, returned to the USA to organize a working-class-based, tactically militant, independent woman-suffrage insurgency; her status as the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton gave her special influence.<sup>36</sup> By 1913, under her leadership, tens of thousands of women were marching in New York City, and the example of suffrage parades was spreading across the country. Despite the dictums of the Second International, American socialist women cooperated closely with

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<sup>33</sup> International Council of Women, *Women in a Changing World. The Dynamic Story of the ICW Since 1888*, London 1966

<sup>34</sup> Pankhurst, p. 333.

<sup>35</sup> Evans, *Comrades and Sisters*, pp. 68–75

<sup>36</sup> Susan L. Englander, 'The San Francisco Wage Earners' Suffrage League: Class Conflict and Class Coalition in the California Woman Suffrage Movement, 1907–1912', M.A. thesis, San Francisco State University, 1989; DuBois, 'Working Women' After American women won the vote, Blatch became an active member of the SPUSA, and ran for office on its ticket.

these independent left suffragettes. In California in 1911, in Wisconsin in 1912, even in New York, it was often difficult to distinguish the two groups or to predict which feminists would show up inside the party, and which outside. In 1913 this suffrage revival culminated with a mass suffrage parade in Washington D.C. and the creation of a national suffragette society.<sup>77</sup>

In the United States there was no significant tradition of property-based enfranchisement, and this undoubtedly defused class antagonisms among woman-suffrage forces and allowed socialists and non-socialists to cooperate. The reactionary force in American suffrage politics was rather the question of race, which interfered with the drive for woman suffrage, much as the dilemma of householder suffrage did in Britain. While Afro-American women were proportionately more active than white women on behalf of votes for women, the rise of the female suffrage movement coincided with the brunt of the attack on Black political power. The leaders of American suffragism included founders of the NAACP and they included racists, but the forces in American politics favoured the latter. In particular, the Democratic Party—the party of labour and of nostalgia for slavery—was the place where female enfranchisement and Black disenfranchisement met. Despite increasing determination, size and power, the woman-suffrage movement was held up in its final drive to amend the Federal Constitution by opposition from southern Democrats, unwilling to enfranchise any more Black people. As was the case with Labour in Britain, it took time for suffragists to bring the Democratic Party round. In the end, suffragists won enough victories at the state level (notably New York in 1917) to increase their Congressional power and break the national political log jam.<sup>78</sup>

British militants also inspired independent suffragists in France, but there, unlike in the USA, there was no parallel socialist suffrage movement, little organized suffragism among working-class women, and thus suffragette passions did not flourish in the same way. A militant and socialist-feminist organization, *Solidarité des Femmes*, was organized as early as 1893, but could find no men's socialist organization willing to work with them. Inspired by the WSPU's first efforts at civil disobedience, *Solidarité* activists organized a series of public, outdoor demonstrations, culminating in physical attacks on men's ballots (voting urns were up-ended and their contents destroyed). Despite the heritage of the revolutions of 1789, 1848 and 1871, French

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<sup>77</sup> M.J. Buhle, M. Tax, J. Buenker and C. Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910–1928*, New York 1986.

<sup>78</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, New York 1984. A distinctive feature of American suffrage politics is dual sovereignty over the franchise. States can grant full voting rights (including the vote in federal elections) by amending their constitutions. From the viewpoint of a popular suffrage movement like Votes for Women, this meant that activists could pursue their goal at either the state or the federal level, so that when one route was blocked they could turn to another. Women in many states thus voted, including for federal offices, before the Federal Constitution was amended in 1920. Thus, office holders dependent on women's votes played a role in the final stages of female enfranchisement, in other words, women's votes won women's votes.

women did not respond to Solidarité's challenge for women to take to the streets. Hause and Kenney attribute what they call the French 'taboo against activity in the streets' among women to the absence of 'the leavening [effect] of working-class experience' on women's sense of the politically possible. In 1914, independent left feminists tried once again to organize a militant suffrage movement directed at working-class women, but by then it was too late and war was upon them.<sup>59</sup>

The suffragette example also shaped the Irish woman-suffrage movement, which was only fitting given the role that Irish constitutional nationalists played in holding up a final parliamentary solution to votes for women in Britain. The Catholicism of France and Italy is often cited as an explanation for their outrageously delayed enfranchisement of women, but the influence of Catholicism proved no serious barrier to the flourishing of militant suffragism in Ireland. The leading figure here was Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, a socialist, friend of Irish labour and militant suffragist. Inspired by the Pankhursts, she organized the Irish Women's Franchise League, which heckled politicians (Churchill at Belfast), held demonstrations and engaged in that signature suffragette activity—breaking windows with stones. Their political focus was on the amendment of the Home Rule Bill to include woman suffrage. In their struggle to influence the shape of the coming Irish nation, the suffragists eventually gained the support of the Irish Labour Party. Irish women got the vote on equal terms with men in 1922 in their new republic, six years before the British.<sup>60</sup>

Nor was it only Europeans and North Americans who responded to the feminist excitement of the British suffragettes. In 1912 in Nanking, China, The Woman Suffrage Alliance, an independent socialist-feminist group, petitioned the provisional parliament to 'enact equality of the sexes and recognize women's right to vote'. Convinced that the men would not take their demand seriously, they armed themselves with pistols, stormed the parliament building three days in a row and had to be dragged off by guards. In imitation of the WSPU, they broke windows, 'drenching their hands in fresh blood'. Around the world, suffragette sisters celebrated their dedication. The WSPU itself sent a message of support, and in New York the president of the national suffrage organization paraded under a sign declaring 'Catching Up with China'.<sup>61</sup>

### Winning the Vote

In the classic account of woman suffrage—the one that assumes its

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<sup>59</sup> Hause and Kenney, p. 118.

<sup>60</sup> Leah Levenson and Jerry H. Natterstad, *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington: Irish Feminist*, Syracuse 1986, p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> Kazuko, pp. 80–92. Argentinian suffragists, exasperated with a ridiculously limited municipal suffrage, organized the Partido Feminista Nacional, in imitation of the British WSPU. Argentine municipal woman suffrage was available only to women 'of majority age who were free to administer their own estates or who had university degrees that allowed them to work in professions'. Ann Poscaletto, *Power and Power: The Female in Iberian Families, Societies and Cultures*, Westport, Conn. 1976, p. 191.

fundamental conservatism—the war is given a great deal of credit for enfranchising women. As Steven Hause and Anne Kenney observe, this is a way of denying the ‘generations of feminist labor that made enfranchisement possible’. Involvement in the war in no way correlates with the enfranchisement of women. Combatant countries—France, Italy and Belgium—did not enfranchise women; while neutral nations—the Netherlands and Scandinavia—were among the first to do so. In some countries, for instance Denmark and Iceland, the war held up the enfranchisement of women, which was already in place by 1914. In France, according to Hause and Kenney, the war was actually ‘a setback for the woman-suffrage movement’; the world war after which French women were enfranchised was, of course, the second one.<sup>62</sup> Only in Germany and Austria, where defeat and revolution brought in socialist governments which enfranchised women, can a more direct causal role be attributed to the war. In Britain and the United States the war provided time (and a supra-partisan environment) for the political forces necessary to enfranchise women to mature.

Indeed, a case can be made that the fundamental impact the war had on the woman-suffrage movement was much more negative: it shattered the socialist-feminist link that underlay suffragism’s growth and vigour. The war split the suffrage movement in two, just as it did international socialism. The majority of socialists and suffragists advocated preparedness, war work, and service to the state. In Germany, the SPD formally embraced the war, as did the non-socialist woman-suffrage movement. In Britain, Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst became intensely pro-war, renaming the *Suffragette* magazine *Britannia*. Elsewhere, independent militants tended more to the anti-war camp. In the USA the suffragette National Woman’s Party resisted pro-war jingoism, running afoul of anti-sedition laws even before the Industrial Workers of the World. In Ireland, Sheehy-Skeffington became a militant pacifist. In Britain, Sylvia Pankhurst became one of the leading anti-war feminists. The international feminist pacifist network that these activists formed became the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Among women leaders within organized socialism, Clara Zetkin, who had long since been driven from the SPD’s leadership, opposed the war.

The rise of Bolshevism also made the distance between socialism and feminism much greater—stretched the hyphen to breaking point as it were. As parliamentary socialism was repudiated, woman suffrage ceased to have much relevance. ‘The subject of political rights... is one about which radical women have already stopped thinking’, wrote American socialist (and former suffrage activist) Anita Block. ‘The radical woman is now looking forward to voting as it is done in the Soviet Union, and pure political suffrage has ceased to have interest or value for her.’<sup>63</sup> She made this statement in November 1917, days after women had finally won suffrage in her home state of New York and while the October Revolution was still fresh as flowers in

<sup>62</sup> Hause and Kenney, p. 202; Evans, *The Feminists*, p. 223.

<sup>63</sup> Bunker, p. 126.



her heart. In France, 'Bolshevism enlarged the disagreements between bourgeois feminists and socialist women, driving each group away from conciliation.'<sup>64</sup> As Communism developed, it preserved the formal support of women's rights that had characterized the socialist tradition, but refused to tolerate the independent organization of women necessary to give it meaning. In the whole history of the Left, the Third International stands out for its failure to generate a corollary feminist movement.<sup>65</sup>

As for the non-Communist remains of the suffrage movement, those who refused to repudiate the Left were relentlessly red-baited, themselves treated as subversives. In the United States, Jane Addams was hounded, and in Hungary, Rosika Schwimmer was pursued. The worldwide reaction against Bolshevism drove many feminists to the right. In the United States, the National Woman's Party became devoted to the single issue of the Equal Rights Amendment; that is, it jettisoned all the other social-justice concerns that had linked suffragist feminism to the Left. Under the leadership of Alice Paul, American radical feminism was reformulated as a women's movement which dissociated itself from other progressive movements, a far cry from what it had meant before the war. In France, a small Catholic suffrage movement developed immediately after the war, largely, it seems, because the Left had dropped the issue; it was unable to win women the vote. In Italy, the unfilled promises of votes for women were waiting for Mussolini to exploit, and in the 1920s Fascists gave Italian women municipal suffrage, only to gut local governments of any autonomy or power. Only in Argentina did the Right successfully seize on and deliver the unmet demand of votes for women.<sup>66</sup> Between the revived hostility on the Left to feminism and the rightward turn of suffragist successor organizations, the charge of women's political conservatism was revived. Without socialist-feminists to develop a left politics that spoke to women's needs, or to bring socialism to women once it did, why should this not have been the case?

The history of the movement for woman suffrage goes beyond the 1920s, as do the efforts of some women to hold on to both feminism and the Left despite the tensions between them. What little we know of women's movements for political equality in the Third World suggests similar patterns to those in Europe and North America in the early twentieth century. There were left-wing, working-class-based efforts for the enfranchisement of women in Iran, Puerto Rico,

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<sup>64</sup> Hause and Kenney observe that among the fourteen reasons given by a government commission against woman suffrage in 1919 were the contradictory assertions that women were too backward to vote ('their uninformed participation would pose a grave threat to the republic') and that feminists posed a violent threat to social order 'like the Bolsheviks' (p. 238).

<sup>65</sup> From 1920 to 1925, Zetkin led a Communist women's international, and there are some national exceptions to this generalization.

<sup>66</sup> Marifran Carlson, *Feminism: The Women's Movement in Argentina From Its Beginnings to Eva Peron*, Chicago 1988.

Mexico, Uruguay, Argentina, Indonesia, and perhaps Turkey.<sup>67</sup> It is possible to argue that, between 1920 and the late 1960s, this is where the left-feminist tradition, the politics which situated women's emancipation in the context of a larger vision of human justice (and which, conversely, insisted that any vision of social transformation must include women as well as men), found its home.

North American and European new-left women of the late 1960s, eager to apply the promise of 'liberation' to their own sex, found their initial inspiration less in the history of feminism at home, which seemed pale and reformist, than in the militant women activists of Cuba and Vietnam. Nor was this simply a new-left fantasy of Third World revolution, female style, for there were vigorous dialogues over women's rights that had occurred within and influenced the Third World Left.<sup>68</sup> A young American woman anti-war activist recalls that she was first exposed to feminist consciousness at an international conference between Vietnamese revolutionaries and American peace activists in Czechoslovakia in 1967, and she drew on the lessons from the Vietnamese women she had met to build a women's liberation movement at home.<sup>69</sup> At about that time, International Women's Day came home.

Indeed, for women in colonial situations, it may be less tempting and/or possible to choose gender over class, or vice versa, than it was for First World feminists. Black and Chicana feminists in the United States are beginning to make a similar argument explicitly with respect to race: their political concerns are simultaneously those of their people and their sex. 'The necessity of addressing all oppressions is one of the hallmarks of black feminist thought', writes Deborah K. King.<sup>70</sup> So long as the politics of resistance insists that 'one particular domination precipitates all really important oppressions,' she argues, black women's 'history of resistance to multiple jeopardies is replete with the fierce tensions, untenable ultimatums, and bitter compromises between nationalism, feminism and class politics.' But 'multiple jeopardy' needn't mean only marginality and exclusion from what King calls 'monist' political ideologies. It can also generate 'multiple consciousness', a flexible, complex and inclusive perspective on social oppression and human liberation. '"Women of color" have

<sup>67</sup> The English-language scholarship on post-1920 suffrage movements is just beginning to be accumulated. Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London 1986 is particularly worthy of note. Also see Jane Macias, *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940*, Westport, Conn. 1982; Deniz Kandiyoti, 'From Empire to Nation State: Transformations of the Woman Question in Turkey', and Sylvia Villanul and Graciela Spariza, 'Feminism and Politics: Women and the Vote in Uruguay', in S. Jay Kleinberg, ed., *Revising Women's History*, Oxford 1988.

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, David Marr, 'The 1920s Women's Rights Debates in Vietnam', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1976.

<sup>69</sup> The first contact between Vietnamese revolutionaries and American peace activists was made through the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Jakarta a year or two before (personal communication by Vivian Rothstein to the author, 1990.) Nor was this merely token female equality, Soviet style. Madame Binh was a leader of the NLF, when such women leaders were a rarity in international politics.

<sup>70</sup> Deborah K. King, 'Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology', *Signs*, vol. 14, 1988, p. 43.

a chance to build an effective unity that does not replicate the imperializing, totalizing revolutionary subjects of previous Marxisms and feminisms', writes Donna Haraway. Such a perspective is crucial to modern politics, to crafting an effective response to what she calls the 'disorderly polyphony emerging from decolonization'.<sup>71</sup> However difficult it is, we have no choice but to reject false oppositions, to refuse to yield to unnecessary 'either-ors', and to hold to the territory of the hyphen.

<sup>71</sup> Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Last Quarter', in Hansen and Philipson, p. 587.

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Stephen Padgett  
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## The Rise and Fall of the West German Left

Left politics in West Germany in the period 1945–90 were marked first by the rise of the SPD, leading to its participation in government in the years 1966–82, and then by a sequence of election defeats, each more serious than the last. The strength of SPD performance can be measured not only in its electoral support but also in terms of the clarity and coherence of the party's basic project and programme. The politics of the party were shaped, firstly, by a secular decline in the salience of class in political behaviour; secondly, from the end of the sixties, by the emergence into political life of a new Left; and, thirdly, throughout the period, by transformations in East–West relations. Whilst these phenomena were present to a greater or lesser extent in all advanced industrial countries, they were accentuated in the Federal Republic by the intensity of West German economic development and by the intimate impact of the Cold War on the very form of the state, with the looming presence of the 'other Germany' as a constant negative reference point. Nevertheless, the SPD was able to turn an adverse situation to its

advantage. Despite Christian Democrat insinuations that it shared a common philosophy with the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) of East Germany, the SPD became a pillar of the Federal Republic. Indeed Willy Brandt as mayor of West Berlin, and later as Chancellor, was successively the symbol of Western defiance of Stalinism and the architect of an Ostpolitik that sought, from a vantage point of Western strength, to replace confrontation with relaxation and reform. Success in the sixties and seventies, then, stemmed in part from skillful adaptation to a changing Federal Republic and a divided Germany; but here also was the seed of a future problem, of which more below. However, it was not only the Cold War which posed problems for the SPD and the West German Left.

In the fifties, unprecedented affluence, social mobility, and a consequent weakening of traditional social networks led to a rapid 'social democratization'. The social-democratic SPD rapidly established a monopoly of the Left; the Communist Party (KPD), weakened by its identification with the GDR, was practically extinct electorally by 1953. Within the SPD, the prewar neo-Marxist tradition was expunged, and left opposition marginalized. In programmatic, electoral and organizational terms, the SPD became the model of the social-democratic *Volkspartei* ('people's party' or 'catch-all party'), successfully exploiting this style of politics throughout the late sixties and the seventies. Although it retained an electoral base in the manual working class, the party transcended class divisions in the electorate. It identified socialism with 'progressive' elements in the liberal-democratic tradition using the slogans of freedom, justice and solidarity. However, these principles were difficult to reconcile with the emphasis on economic discipline and individualism which accompanied instability in the global economy after 1973, and consequently West German social democracy began to lose its intellectual and political coherence.

West Germany was also in the vanguard of the counter-cultural or 'new politics' movement which accompanied the affluence of post-industrial society. 'As a society makes substantial progress in addressing traditional economic and security needs, a growing share of the public shifts their attention to *post-material goals* that are still in short supply, such as the quality of life, self-expression and personal freedom.'<sup>1</sup> In embryonic form at least, a new sociopolitical division emerged which cut across the SPD's electorate and membership. The party's own educational and public-welfare programmes created new social forces prone to question both the forms of West German affluence and the liberal corporate ethos of the *Volkspartei*. Although the sixties student movement appeared quickly to exhaust itself, it left a cultural-political residue of lasting significance. Unable to resolve the dualism between old and new Left, the SPD failed to contain the new currents, and lost its monopoly left of centre. The rise of the Greens as a rival on the left seriously curtailed the SPD's ability to exploit its *Volkspartei* model, forcing the party to rethink many of its assumptions. However, programmatically and organizationally, the 'new politics' values were very difficult to reconcile with SPD orthodoxy.

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<sup>1</sup> Russell J. Dalton, 'The German Voter', in W.E. Paterson, G. Smith and P. Merkl, eds., *Developments in West German Politics*, London 1989, p. 113.

Moreover, although it was evident that far-reaching social and political change was underway, it was less clear exactly where these changes were leading. Oskar Lafontaine appeared to offer a way of negotiating these problems, but just as he did so both the party and its leader found themselves wrong-footed by the speed of unification in 1990.

While all West German parties were historically committed to unification, the SPD of the 1970s became especially associated with an Ostpolitik of detente and improved relations between the FRG and the GDR. Nevertheless, the successful mobilization of the people of East Germany in 1989 set a new agenda to which the opposition SPD adjusted with difficulty. The Christian Democrats and the Free Democrats, as the parties in government, set their stamp on unification and have been the immediate gainers from it. Before considering recent events, however, it is appropriate to trace the distinctive character and evolution of the Left in the Federal Republic—bearing in mind also that unification has taken place under the aegis of the latter.

## I Establishing the Social-Democratic *Volkspartei*

The SPD's course in the postwar era was set by the socioeconomic and political landscape of the early years of the Federal Republic. For a number of reasons, the decline of class politics experienced in other Western European countries was especially marked here. Firstly, observers have detected a double 'ideological trauma' arising from the experience of the Third Reich, on the one hand, and the installation of a repressive Communist regime in East Germany, on the other. A recoil from ideology was the reflex response, the consequences of which accentuated those social trends—increasing affluence and social homogeneity—that served to weaken class politics elsewhere in the fifties. Secondly, the early postwar years witnessed an unprecedented influx of refugees from the East (twelve million by 1947). Demographic movements on this scale inevitably weakened social tradition and class ties, 'an important precondition for the development of catch-all parties in West Germany'.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, the success of the CDU-CSU (aided by the social geography of national partition) in re-establishing the tradition of political Catholicism, and augmenting it with a cross-confessional Christian alliance, extended their electoral base well beyond the middle class. The Christian Union parties became the prototype of Kirchheimer's model of the *Volkspartei*, in which class politics and overt party ideology were de-emphasized.<sup>3</sup> The logic of this model was such that Christian Democrat electoral success would force opposition parties to emulate their style.

Although it had long ceased to be a Marxist party of the working class, the post-1945 SPD remained bound by the socialist traditions of the pre-1933 era. After 1952, however, the Social Democrats undertook a rapid and clear-cut reorientation. Change was seen explicitly in terms of the transition from *Arbeiterpartei* (workers' party) to *Volkspartei*

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<sup>2</sup> Eva Kolinsky, *Parties, Opposition and Society in West Germany*, London 1984, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Otto Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of the Western European Party Systems', in J. La Palombara and M. Wiener, eds., *Political Parties and Political Development*, Princeton 1966.

(people's party), and meant transforming the SPD from its association with a dense and homogeneous social-democratic culture into 'a party which was not only attractive to those who believed in its programme *in toto*, but also to those who were broadly supportive even though there might be a few ideas to which they could not subscribe'.<sup>4</sup> The transformation had three dimensions: programmatic, organizational and electoral. The Bad Godesberg programme of 1959 explicitly disavowed the party's Marxist heritage, emphasizing instead eclectic philosophical sources of democratic socialism in the Christian ethic, classical philosophy, and the humanist tradition. It endorsed the liberal pluralism of the Federal Republic and its uncompromising Western orientation. Capitulating to the success of the bourgeois parties' social-market formula, the programme embraced unconditionally the axioms of Keynesian social democracy—arms-length interventionism and the management of economic growth.

In organizational terms the transformation represented a further step toward the dismantling of what Lösche has termed the social-democratic 'solidarity community',<sup>5</sup> the main features of which—social homogeneity and inner-party democracy—had been eroded long before the Second World War. With the opening up to the *neue Mitte* (new middle class), however, the social composition of the party began to change very rapidly (see Table I). Moreover, the streamlining and centralization of its structure narrowed the scope for inner-party democracy as the party was geared increasingly to electoral mobilization.

Table I.  
New SPD Party Members by Occupation 1958–1982 (%)

Social Group	1958	1966	1972	1982
White collar employees/civil servants	21.0	27.5	34.0	33.1
Manual workers	55.0	49.4	27.6	21.1
Housewives	11.2	9.0	9.0	13.7
Pensioners	5.4	4.1	3.7	9.2
Students	–	–	15.9	12.8

Electoral breakthrough in the sixties and early seventies was due largely to the party's new-found ability to exploit the changing composition of the electorate—the decline of the manual working class and rise of the *neue Mitte*. While in fact the manual-worker vote remained stable during this period, its relative weight in the SPD's electorate was reduced as the party increased its share of the burgeoning new middle-class constituency. This effected a significant change in the class balance of SPD support.

The identity and political behaviour of the new middle class has been explained by some as 'the proletarianization of new social layers'. In consequence, it has been argued, 'there is no reason to change the old

<sup>4</sup> Kurt Klotzbach, *Der Weg zur Staatspartei, Programmatik, praktische Politik und Organisation der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1945 bis 1965*, Berlin 1982, pp. 417–18.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Lösche, 'Ende der sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterbewegung?', *Die neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefi*, no. 5, 1988, pp. 453–63.

[class party] scheme'.<sup>6</sup> However, the new middle class is more complex and nuanced than this viewpoint suggests: '[It has] a position in the social structure and a life style that places it between the working class and the old middle class. As a result its loyalties are divided between these other two strata, and its votes are split between the parties of the left and right.'<sup>7</sup> Therefore, although the SPD established a relatively stable electoral relationship with the *secular/trade-union member* stratum, the new middle class as a whole was more ambivalent in its identifications, and volatile in its voting behaviour. Volatility was especially marked amongst the *secular, non-union member* sector, a source of SPD strength in the 1965-72 elections.<sup>8</sup>

### The Conditions of Electoral Success

In the decade after 1959 the main objectives of the Godesberg strategy—electoral expansion and the acquisition of government power—were achieved. Steady advance in the middle to late sixties culminated in the election of 1972 in which, for the only time in the history of the Federal Republic, the SPD polled more votes than the CDU-CSU. Thereafter, into the early eighties, the SPD vote remained stable at the level of 1969. The party thus entered government, first in the Grand Coalition with the CDU-CSU (1966), then in the Social-Liberal Coalition with the liberal FDP (1969-82). Social-democratic government was marked by its pragmatism, accentuated after Helmut Schmidt succeeded Willy Brandt as chancellor in 1974. Party cohesion and government stability depended on the leadership's ability to manage and contain left opposition.

Economic stability was the first priority, pursued initially through Keynesian counter-cyclical instruments, but with an increasing emphasis on monetary policy after 1974.<sup>9</sup> Social reform, with which Brandt had personally identified himself, was frustrated by the veto of the coalition partner, or by the exigencies of economic restraint. After an initial period of limited domestic reform and a dramatic reorientation of West Germany's Ostpolitik, the internal and external security of the state became an overriding preoccupation. A condition of the Grand Coalition had been SPD support for the Emergency Laws (1968), whilst the Social-Liberal coalition was responsible for the Radical Decree (1972) restricting the entry of leftists into public-service employment, and anti-terrorist legislation which aroused protests against the erosion of civil rights. In the late seventies, Chancellor Schmidt committed the government unequivocally to the NATO decision to upgrade its INF weaponry with the deployment of cruise and Pershing missiles.

<sup>6</sup> Günther Minnerup, 'West Germany since the War', *NLA* 99, September-October 1976, pp. 3-44.

<sup>7</sup> Kendall L. Baker, Russell J. Dalton and Kai Hildebrandt, *Germany Transformed: Political Culture and the New Politics*, Cambridge, Mass. 1981, p. 172.

<sup>8</sup> Hans-Dieter Klingemann, 'West Germany', in I. Crewe and D. Denver, eds., *Electoral Change in Western Democracies*, London 1985, p. 232.

<sup>9</sup> Fritz Scharpf, 'Economic and Institutional Constraints of Full Employment Strategies: Sweden, Austria and West Germany', in J.H. Goldthorpe, ed., *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism*, Cambridge 1984, p. 284.



This exercise of state power precipitated a mobilization of the Left, both inside and outside the SPD. The rise of the *Ausserparlamentarische Opposition* (Extraparliamentary Opposition) in the late sixties was, of course, part of the international movement of the New Left. In West Germany, however, the formation of the Grand Coalition and the passage of the Emergency Laws were issues that crystallized an otherwise formless movement. The response of the SPD leadership—opposing the radical movement while seeking to attract its sympathizers<sup>30</sup>—followed a pattern established in the late fifties in relation to the extraparliamentary opposition to German rearmament. There was much sympathy for this opposition in the rank and file of the party, and the presence of a significant APO enclave in the SPD's youth wing, the JUSOS. Moreover, it raised the danger of an electoral challenge from the Left. Whilst distancing the party from APO, the SPD leadership, led by Brandt, attempted to integrate the participants. Thus, demarcation was combined with a defence of the SPD's electoral monopoly of the Left.

The impact of the APO movement on the SPD was far-reaching. An influx of radical youth changed the composition of the party and completed the radicalization of JUSOS, which became a vehicle for the Left. Concerned above all with the issue of participation, their presence in the party *Basis* (grass roots) had the effect of revitalizing moribund participatory structures. Their ambitions, however, went further: they advocated the doctrine of the imperative mandate, by which elected representatives would be tied to decisions of the membership. Here they anticipated one of the organizational principles of the Greens. Though successful in displacing the old-guard leadership in some big city *Unterbexirke* (sub-district) organizations, they largely failed at the key level of the *Bexirke* (districts). Thus, despite considerable factional conflict at the local level, the balance of power between the central party machine and the district enabled the leadership to maintain control of, among other things, parliamentary-candidate selection and the party congress.<sup>31</sup>

The capacity of the leadership to head off the Left's challenge stemmed from the organizational structure of the party, which enables an optimization of inner-party management. Power is concentrated in dual leadership bodies, the executive and the presidium. The executive comprises the party leader and two deputies, plus thirty-six members elected by the congress. Meeting monthly, it elects in turn the presidium, a more streamlined body that meets weekly. Since its inception in the overhaul of 1958, the presidium has effectively become the party's supreme policy- and decision-making body. Presidium decisions pass to the executive for formal approval, usually without amendment, though sometimes after debate. Indirect election ensured that the presidium has been less permeable by the Left than has the executive. During the Social-Liberal coalition era, the

<sup>30</sup> Stephan Gorol, 'Zwischen Integration und Abgrenzung: SPD und studentische Protestbewegung', *Die neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Heft*, no. 7, 1988, pp. 601-7.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Padgett and Tony Burkett, *Political Parties and Elections in West Germany: The Search for a New Stability*, London 1986, pp. 71-4.

presidium identified closely with the government, endorsing policy which had usually originated with the chancellor or in government ministries. The executive, however, more closely reflected the political composition of the party, and the Left was able to secure between a quarter and a third of seats. Thus, the executive sometimes adopted an adversarial position, as it did in 1977 when advocating a moratorium on the government's nuclear-energy programme. However, it was more usual to find it mediating between government and party, attempting to reconcile government policy with social-democratic principles.

Elite domination in the SPD is compounded by the structure of the party congress. Although in party statutes the congress is the sovereign policy-making organ, the reality is quite different. The executive largely controls the agenda and usually secures support for policy decisions emanating from the party leadership. Delegate selection is carried out by district congresses. In the Social-Liberal coalition years, SPD chancellors were usually able to manipulate party congresses: both Brandt and Schmidt repeatedly invoked their electoral mandate, national responsibilities and prestige to free themselves from accountability, although Schmidt faced increasing opposition in the later years of his chancellorship.

While the Left was thus prevented from exercising significant influence at the federal level, the leadership made an attempt to integrate the JUSOS and the Left into the party mainstream by involving them in the formulation of a new medium-term programme. The first programme draft under the chairmanship of Helmut Schmidt was shelved in the face of left criticism. Under Peter von Örtzen, identified with the strategy of integrating the Left, a new draft was produced, and approved in 1975. However, the programme failed to fulfil the demand for the overall perspective which the Left had advocated.

Left mobilization also took place at parliamentary level. With the growth of the party's *Bundestagsfraktion* (parliamentary party) in 1969 and 1972, the Left achieved a significant presence in the *Fraktion* for the first time. Organized initially in the Group of the Sixteenth Floor (their location in the Bundestag building) and later in the Leverkusener Circle, the Left numbered around thirty to forty deputies, with occasional support from about twenty others.<sup>12</sup> The main objective was to offer support when members defied the party whip, to win the support of the Centre-Left, and to promote members in contests for *Fraktion* posts. It has been argued persuasively that factions have performed a stabilizing function in the SPD, structuring the careers of their members and integrating them into the party mainstream.<sup>13</sup> Certainly the mobilization of the Left in the Bundestag never seriously challenged the domination of the Right during the Social-Liberal coalition era, and there existed none of the bitter factional conflict characteristic of the local level of party life.

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<sup>12</sup> Gerard Braunthal, *The West German Social Democrats 1969-82; Profile of a Party in Power*, Boulder, Colorado 1983, p. 209.

<sup>13</sup> Ferdinand Müller Rommel, *Interparteiliche Gruppierungen in der SPD; eine empirische Studie über informell-organisierte Gruppierungen von 1969-1980*, Opladen 1982, p. 267.

Factional conflict in the SPD as a whole receded for a period after 1973. Sectarianism within JUSOS eroded its organizational vitality and reduced its strength to the point where the party leadership felt sufficiently confident to expel its more militant leaders.<sup>14</sup> The failure of JUSOS—whose orientation was predominantly academic—was its inability to build bridges with the party's labour wing, which remained uniformly hostile. In the late seventies, however, conflict resurfaced over the new issues of the environment, and in particular nuclear energy. Opposition to the government's nuclear programme included JUSOS, but was much more broadly based. At successive congresses it was narrowly but consistently defeated, heightening disillusionment on the left, especially amongst the young. For many, the fast-growing *Bürgerinitiativen* (citizens' initiative) movement represented a more congenial political home than the SPD. The success of the Greens after 1980 was due largely to their ability to exploit the ambivalence of the young towards the Social Democrats.<sup>15</sup>

### Crisis of Identity

The break-up of the Social-Liberal coalition with the FDP (1969–82) culminated two years of deteriorating relations between the parties. The Bundestag election saw the FDP increase its share of the vote whilst SPD support remained stagnant. Its self-confidence bolstered, the FDP became more assertive within the coalition. As the international recession finally hit the Federal Republic, Lambsdorff, the FDP Economics Minister, advocated budgetary austerity in the face of mounting state debt, whilst Genscher, the Foreign Minister, pressed for a more unequivocal stance on NATO strategy in relation to the deployment of cruise and Pershing II missiles. The shift to the right had been under way since the mid 1970s, but the party had been inhibited from a coalition switch by a number of factors, including the electoral popularity of Chancellor Schmidt, and the harmony that had existed between the SPD and FDP on defence and economic issues. As Schmidt's authority in the SPD and among the electorate waned, the FDP found less and less reason to remain in the coalition. The denouement took place in Summer 1982, with the FDP crossing the floor of the Bundestag and joining the CDU-CSU to install Helmut Kohl as chancellor. The new centre-right coalition was confirmed in government by the elections of March 1983, January 1987, and December 1990.

Although the new coalition often displayed instability, and the FDP held its coalition options open, the prospects for a renewal of the Social-Liberal coalition were remote. The appearance of new-left and anti-Atlanticist politics in the SPD made it a more problematic partner for the FDP. Effectively this condemned the SPD to permanent opposition during the 1980s, since the electoral landscape dictates that neither major party can hope to win a mandate to govern alone. The potential for a Left coalition was limited by key policy differences between the SPD and the Greens and by the latter's unpredictability. Moreover, the SPD was uncertain where its long-term

<sup>14</sup> Braunthal, pp. 85–102.

<sup>15</sup> Wolfgang Michal, *Die SPD—Staatsstreik und Jugendfrei*, Hamburg 1988, pp. 61–8

preferences lay. Faced with the choice of coalition with the FDP or of consolidating relations with the Greens, the SPD sat on the fence. To many, this was tantamount to an admission of strategic bankruptcy, only marginally relieved by the elaboration after 1987 of the objective of a 'structural majority'—a situation where electoral arithmetic would make the SPD an indispensable component in coalition-building.

The exodus of much of the SPD's 'activist left' to the Greens, and the in-built domination by party elites, prevented the sharp swing to the left experienced by the British Labour Party after 1979. Although Schmidt went into opposition in 1982, there was more continuity than change in the political composition of the top leadership bodies. A steady leftward shift in the party at large did not prevent 'old guard' figures like Hans-Jochen Vogel and Johannes Rau from retaining their authority. The most significant change took place in the *Länder*, with the emergence of Oskar Lafontaine in the Saarland, Gerhard Schröder in Lower Saxony, and Björn Engholm in Schleswig-Holstein. However, their 'new-left' image was tempered with a strong streak of pragmatism. The advance of the Left at district level increased its weight in the congress, and in 1986 a more left-oriented executive was returned. For the most part, however, new entrants like Heidi Wieczorek-Zeul were more intent on playing down their radical left reputations than on bringing about fundamental policy change.

The demise of the Social-Liberal coalition in 1982 was widely regarded in the SPD as a watershed, bringing to a close the post-Godesberg era. West Germany's ability to insulate itself from the instability of world markets was exhausted. Schmidt's *Modell Deutschland* had been achieved through the introduction—partly at the behest of the Bundesbank—of monetary caution and pay discipline. It had entailed an explicit renunciation of the axioms of post-Godesberg social democracy. Presenting the 1981 budget, Finance Minister Hans Matthöfer had announced that the state could no longer underwrite full employment, that its capacity to influence economic development had to be more modestly assessed, and that ultimately it was not state spending but entrepreneurial vitality that was decisive for economic success.<sup>16</sup> Predictably, such a shift in economic policy caused widespread disquiet in the party and ultimately created a schism with the labour movement, which had become unbridgeable by 1982. The 'growth management' conception of social democracy also came under attack from 'post-materialist' quarters. The unqualified assumption of economic growth as a primary objective was challenged, as was the belief implicit in the Godesberg model that science and technology provided objective answers to social and economic problems. In defence and security also, SPD orthodoxy became unsustainable amongst a party membership greatly influenced by a newly resurgent peace movement.

This abandonment of the social-democratic model was accompanied

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<sup>16</sup> Douglas Webber, *German Social Democracy in the Economic Crisis; Unemployment and the Politics of Labour Market Policy in the Federal Republic of Germany from 1974 to 1982*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Essex, 1984, pp.99–100.

by a decomposition of the SPD electorate; consequently programmatic renewal became a necessary precondition of electoral revival. Central problems requiring redefinition included: the relationship between state and market; reconciling the values of industrialism and post-industrialism; establishing a balance between social solidarity and individualism; combining peace and détente with defence and security. The party was faced with a crisis of identity. This crisis also had an organizational dimension. Bureaucratic control by the leadership had maintained internal stability in the seventies by suppressing or neutralizing left opposition, but at the cost of sterility and passivity at the party base. Bureaucratization and an attenuation of democratic inner-party life were tendencies inherent in the SPD almost from its inception, but they were greatly accentuated in the social-democratic *Volkspartei*. Consequently, the capacity for electoral mobilization and for the diffusion of social-democratic values was weakened. It proved particularly difficult for the SPD to counter the attractions of the participatory style adopted by the Greens.

## II A Changing Electorate: Between Old and New Left

Electoral trends in the Federal Republic reflect the general tendencies in Western Europe towards the de-alignment and realignment of the electorate. *Realignment* implies the break-up of old electoral coalitions between socioeconomic groups and parties, and their replacement by new alignments. *De-alignment* suggests a general weakening in partisanship resulting from a more sophisticated and issue-oriented electorate. In practice it is hard to distinguish between these patterns of electoral change, and there is disagreement over causation.<sup>17</sup> Divergent views also exist concerning the extent of change in the West German electorate.<sup>18</sup> However, certain general trends are beyond doubt: 'the evidence of increasing fluidity in voting patterns is clear... the influence of social class in voting preferences has substantially weakened.'<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the evidence points to a weakening of the traditional left/right division and the emergence of an old politics/new politics dimension—tendencies unfavourable to the SPD.

One clear pattern in voting behaviour has been a polarization between the sunrise-industry states and the rust-belt states. Table II shows the wide disparity in SPD performance between these two groups of states. The party has been quite successful where it has been able to project an appeal to the classical manual-worker strata left behind by affluence elsewhere in the Federal Republic. Its success in early 1990 enabled it to renew governments in the Saarland and North-Rhine/Westphalia, and form a new government in Lower Saxony. However, the inability of the party to gain electorally in those states that have adapted successfully to industrial change—such as

<sup>17</sup> Dalton, pp. 99–121.

<sup>18</sup> Franz-Urban Pappi and Michael Terwey, 'The German Electorate', in H. Döring and G. Smith, *Party Government and Political Culture in West Germany*, London 1982, p. 193; Baker et al., *Germany Transformed*, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Dalton, pp. 107, 119.

Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria—is perceived as a serious problem, and one which became a major focus of attention in the course of the SPD's programme review.

Table II.  
SPD Voting Behaviour in State Elections 1986–90 (%)

State	SPD Vote/Total	Change since Last Election
Bavaria (Oct 1986)	27.5	– 4.4
Hessen (April 1987)	40.2	– 6.0
Rheinland-Pfalz (May 1987)	38.8	– 0.8
Hamburg (May 1987)	45.0	+ 3.3
Bremen (September 1987)	50.5	– 0.8
Baden-Württemberg (March 1988)	32.0	– 0.4
Schleswig-Holstein (May 1988)	54.8	+ 9.6
Berlin (Jan 1989)	37.3	+ 5.0
Saarland (Jan 1990)	54.4	+ 5.2
Lower Saxony (May 1990)	44.2	+ 2.1
North-Rhine/Westphalia (May 1990)	50.0	– 2.1

The decline in the cohesion and relative size of the manual working class has whittled away the party's core electorate. This class had accounted for 79 per cent of employees in 1950, dropping to 58 per cent in 1969 and to 42 per cent in 1986, implying large-scale social mobility; moreover, a significant proportion of the remaining manual workers were *Gastarbeiter* with no vote in the federal elections. The increase in the size of the politically differentiated and electorally volatile new middle class was accompanied by the growth of a 'new Left', conditioned by the unprecedented affluence of the sixties and seventies and defined in terms of post-materialist issues.

The party's dilemma was twofold. Firstly, it had been apparent from the mid seventies that 'the SPD with its electoral strongholds in the working class and the post-materialist section of the new middle class was effectively two parties in one.'<sup>20</sup> However, with the rise of the Greens it faced an increasingly successful rival for the new-left electorate. Free from government responsibility after 1982, the SPD was able to make policy adjustments (on nuclear weapons for instance) which made the party a more congenial political home for this constituency. Nevertheless, there was a clear conflict of values and policies between its old and new left constituencies. Secondly, an internal analysis of the results of the 1987 election detected in sections of its manual-working-class and new-middle-class electorate a shift towards individual economic and social achievement, at variance with the traditional party ethos of social solidarity. Electoral strategy in the eighties revolved around attempts to resolve these dilemmas.

<sup>20</sup> Wolfgang G. Gibowski and Max Kaase 'Die Ausgangslage für die Bundestagswahl am 25 Januar 1987', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte; Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament*, B 48, 1986, p. 5.

Initially, the impact of social and electoral change on the SPD was masked by the popularity of Chancellor Schmidt and the absence of a rival party of the Left. In the Bundestag election of 1983, however, the party experienced an electoral haemorrhage, losing 1.6 million votes to the CDU-CSU and 750,000 votes to the newly emerged Greens.<sup>21</sup> The SPD share of the vote, at 38.2 per cent, was the lowest since 1961. In 1987 it dipped still lower, to 37.0 per cent. Notwithstanding a slight reversal of previous losses to the CDU-CSU, a further 600,000 votes were lost to the Greens.<sup>22</sup> In spite of a 'greening' of SPD policy at the Nürnberg Congress of 1986, the party was still unattractive to the post-materialist new Left.

The party's responses to electoral change revealed a lack of strategic clarity. Abortive attempts to regain the youth vote whilst simultaneously consolidating the manual working class and attracting the upwardly mobile, resulted in confused and confusing appeals. This reached its apogee in the campaign for the 1987 election when a chancellor candidate identified with the SPD's traditional working-class supporters was obliged to stand on an incongruous new-left platform, nevertheless rejecting any possibility of cooperation with the Greens.<sup>23</sup>

**Table III.**  
**Breakdown of Party Support by Social Class (%)**

Party	Old Middle Class		New Middle Class		Working Class	
	1980	1987	1980	1987	1980	1987
CDU-CSU	64	63	39	46	35	36
SPD	28	13	47	31	58	54
FDP	7	18	13	14	6	4.5
Greens	1	5	1	9	1	6

*Source:* Karl Cerny, *Germany at the Polls*, Durham, North Carolina 1990, p. 284.

**Table IV.**  
**Breakdown of the West German Electorate 1950-85 (%)**

	1950	1961	1970	1979	1981	1985
Working Class	51	48	46	42	42	40
New Middle Class	21	30	38	45	46	48
Old Middle Class	28	22	16	13	12	12

*Source:* Karl Cerny, *Germany at the Polls*, Durham, North Carolina 1990, p. 274.

Note: The categories used here are based on standard occupational definitions. The 'working class' refers to manual workers and their families; the 'old middle class' to proprietors, professionals and self-employed; the 'new middle class' to white-collar workers and their families.

<sup>21</sup> *INFA, Report für die Presse*, 26 January 1987.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Padgett, 'The West German Social Democrats in Opposition 1982-86', *West European Politics*, vol 3, no. 10, 1987, pp. 351-2.

The shock of a second successive electoral setback lent greater urgency to the task of redefining strategic objectives. The postmortem into the 1983 defeat had included an electoral study commissioned from the market-research organization INFRATEST. Emphasizing the heterogeneity of the SPD's electorate, the study classified the voters into social-psychological types, recommending the targeting of two electoral groups defined as the 'upwardly mobile' and the 'technocratic liberal' milieus, which constituted some 32 per cent of the electorate and contained a very high concentration of uncommitted voters. The study outlined a political strategy for the purposes of 'addressing groups with highly differentiated conceptions and value orientations... The capacity for winning a majority here does not lie at the level of ideological debate... since the target groups themselves are too highly differentiated at this level. The chance for the SPD lies much more at the level of competitive problem solving.'<sup>24</sup>

### Conflicts over Policy Renewal

The exercise in programmatic renewal on which the SPD embarked in 1984 showed a striking contrast with the Bad Godesberg programme review. (The programme revision of the fifties had a very clear strategic aim: the electoral exploitation of the new middle class alongside the party's traditional manual worker constituency on the lines of the *Volkspartei* model.) The programme-drafting exercise was—at least until its final stages—tentative and lacking in direction. The party's dilemma, and indeed the crux of the project of 'redefining social democracy', was expressed as follows: '[The party] knows that in these changing times a reorientation appears necessary, but change itself makes change hard to accomplish. Science offers no diagnosis of the age (*Zeitdiagnose*), no common understanding of what is happening and what future developments will be. It is very difficult to draw decisive and firm conclusions on the basis of uncertain evidence. Therefore there is a succession of problems in the programme review which it is very difficult to rectify.'<sup>25</sup> The first phase was characterized by confusion (and some conflict) over whether the objective was to supersede the Bad Godesberg programme or merely update it. The Left saw an opportunity to remake the party's identity by constructing a social-democratic *Weltanschauung* drawing on the best of the new-left emphases.<sup>26</sup> The Right, shunning ideology, advocated a more cosmetic approach to programme drafting. The Left's impact on the first programme draft, published in 1986, was, however, subsequently much reduced.

Progress was achieved in two areas. A formula for 'qualitative growth' was developed, aimed at reconciling the potentially conflicting objectives of economic advance and environmental protection. The 'ecological modernization of the economy' involved research and

<sup>24</sup> INFRATEST, *Sozialforschung wurde vom SPD Parteivorstand mit der Durchführung der Studie 'Planungsdaten für eine Mehrheitsfähig SPD' beauftragt*, n.p., copy in SPD Parteivorstand, Abteilung Wahlen, Bonn 1984.

<sup>25</sup> Kurt Sontheimer, *Vernunft*, no. 4, 28 January 1989, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Meyer, 'Grundwerte—idealistisch und nutzlos? Grundsatzfragen im Inneren Entwurf', *Das neue Gesellschaft/Frankfurter Hefte*, no. 2, 1988, p. 173.



investment into clean and sustainable technologies, aimed at fostering a dynamic new growth sector able to create export and employment opportunities. The credibility of the concept depended upon the support of the party's labour wing, important sectors of which had previously been hostile to the 'greening' of policy. Endorsement by the Chemical Workers' Union<sup>27</sup> was a significant breakthrough, and henceforward it became one of the party's front-line policies—'the centrepiece of a social-democratic reform programme for the rest of the century.'<sup>28</sup>

In defence and security, programme drafting proceeded from the decisions of the Cologne and Essen Congresses of 1983–84 condemning the deployment of cruise and Pershing missiles and calling for a reform of NATO strategy. Although the new stance rejected unilateralism, linking the withdrawal of NATO weaponry to a Soviet withdrawal of SS20 missiles, in other respects it amounted to a non-nuclear policy, advocating a nuclear-weapon-free zone in central Europe and rejecting NATO strategies of 'forward defence'. The themes of 'security partnership' and East–West confidence-building were prominent, coupled with a vision of the ultimate dissolution of the two alliance blocs.

The SPD's association with Ostpolitik and with the opening up of contacts between the Federal Republic and GDR had redounded to the party's credit in the seventies and helped to consolidate its position in government. As opposition to cruise missiles grew there was a natural inclination to offer more of the same. The SPD's optimum scenario was for the new detente to lead to increasingly relaxed relations between East and West, including East and West Germany. There was a hope that reform and democracy would advance in the East, but general agreement that German unification was a quite unrealistic and remote project.

While the party's foreign-policy and defence stance revealed differences, these were not unbridgeable. But in other respects, programme drafting indicated deep division, notably in economic policy. The first draft was distinguished from previous programmes by its antagonism towards market capitalism and an emphasis on state intervention: 'Democratic socialism aims not only to improve capitalism but also to put in its place a new social and economic order . . . the economy must have clear framework conditions set for it.'<sup>29</sup> Reflecting sharp conflict between Left and Right, prescriptions for the relationship between state and market in particular lacked definition. These features drew criticism from the Right and became the focus of an intervention from the party's chief economics spokesmen late in the drafting process. Critical of the 'woolly conceptions and outdated formulas which no longer bear any resemblance to reality',<sup>30</sup> they dissociated themselves

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<sup>27</sup> *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2 May 1985.

<sup>28</sup> SPD Parteivorstand, *Politik: Aktuelle Information der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands*, no. 7, July 1985.

<sup>29</sup> SPD Parteivorstand, *Entwurf für ein neues Grundgesetzprogramm der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands*, Bonn 1986, pp. 7, 25.

<sup>30</sup> *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 6 January 1989.

from the draft's hostility to the market and its idealistic trust in the state, advocating instead a more positive appraisal of the market and a greater measure of 'economic realism'.

### The Rise of Lafontaine and the *Enkel*

The most radical intervention in the review took the form of an unprecedented attack on SPD orthodoxy from a group of relatively young, up-and-coming party leaders from the *Länder*. Protégés of Brandt, this circle was known as his *Enkel* (grandchildren). Broadly speaking of the 1968 generation, a number had been leaders of the radical JUSOS movement of the seventies. Their chief characteristic, one that they deliberately sought to project, was their radical chic image and modern lifestyle. Most prominent of the *Enkel* was Oskar Lafontaine, charismatic and electorally successful minister-president of the Saarland. Immediately after the 1987 election, Lafontaine launched his bid for the chancellor candidacy in 1990. His growing dominance was reflected in his elevation to the party vice-chairmanship and to the co-chairmanship of the Programme Commission. Strategic flexibility was now his hallmark, amply demonstrated in his attempt late in the programme-drafting exercise to make the party more attractive to the 'affluent majority' which contained the 'target groups' identified by electoral analysis.

This initiative broke radically from the tradition of left politics in the SPD. Indeed, the ensuing debate cut across orthodox Left-Right divisions, as the old Left, the labour wing and the Right combined to oppose the attack on tradition from the 'new revisionists'. Among other proposals, they advocated a more welcoming approach towards economic restructuring and technological change. The centrepiece of their agenda was a new order in working practices, combining a reduced working week with labour-market deregulation. 'The European Left has at its disposal, if only it can grasp the opportunity, a concrete Utopia which can move millions; a shortening of work time, not only as a technocratic instrument but as a human idea capable of integrating and binding together different strata in society... bringing work and leisure into a new balance.'<sup>31</sup> There was cunning in this choice of issue. On the one hand, a shorter working week appealed to post-materialist and home-centred concerns. On the other, it connected with a classic labour demand. Indeed the mid eighties witnessed a campaign, including strikes waged by the Metal Workers' Union, in favour of a statutory 35-hour week. But the plan provoked a sharp clash with the DGB trade unions, who also opposed his advocacy of flexible hours with no overtime rates. This attack on trade-union orthodoxies was, however, part of a deliberate attempt to distance the party from the labour movement. The party had to be 'responsive to the whole of society, and that meant entrepreneurs, professionals and higher-grade civil servants as well as trade unions'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Peter Glotz, *Wirtschaftswoche*, 29 April 1988.

<sup>32</sup> Gerhard Schröder, *Wirtschaftswoche*, 29 April 1988.

Some of Lafontaine's proposals were included in the programme agreed at the Berlin Congress of December 1989, although they were hedged around with qualifications and concessions to the trade unions. Compromise was possible because the unions were aware that plant-level agreements on the lines advocated by Lafontaine had already proved successful. Moreover, they recognized that in order to preserve the historic ties between social democracy and the labour movement they had to keep in step with the party and with social change. This willingness for compromise underlined the unreservedly social-democratic character of the West German trade unions.<sup>33</sup>

Formally, the West German Union Federation, DGB, was from the outset committed to political neutrality. Nevertheless, at least four fifths of its leading officials have been members of the SPD. There exist two bodies which transmit union concerns to the party: the Union Council (*Gewerkschaftsrat*), set up in 1967 and representing trade-union leaders, and the AFA (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Arbeitnehmerfragen*, the Working Group for Workers' Issues), established in 1972 to represent trade-union organizers and members who support the party. The SPD leadership has used these bodies as a sounding board for trade-union opinion and as a counterweight to new-left influences from the JUSOS and local parties. It should be borne in mind, however, that German trade unions have no 'block vote' at the SPD congress. Moreover, their necessarily indirect financial contributions are of little account compared with the large funds received by the SPD from the state according to its share of the popular vote. The unions are listened to as an important constituency, but they do not have the decisive role of unions in the structure of the British Labour Party.

Notwithstanding continuing trade-union reservations, the intervention of the economics spokesmen was incorporated unconditionally into the programme. The ambivalence of the first draft towards market capitalism and its overtones of interventionism were expunged. Instead emphasis was on the humanization of a dynamic, competitive market economy. The Godesberg credo, 'as much competition as possible; as much planning as necessary', was explicitly reiterated.<sup>34</sup> Despite the elaborate search for new values, the programme thus ended up echoing familiar phrases.

Prior to 1987 this centre-oriented strategy had not been fully embraced for two reasons: chancellor-candidate Rau was identified with the traditional electoral base, and some in the party still aspired to 'a majority left of the Union parties'. Thereafter, the strategy gained ground among key sections of the leadership, notably its economics spokesmen and the group around Oskar Lafontaine who had previously favoured an opening to the new Left. Programmatic renewal assumed a sense of purpose and a focus hitherto lacking. The attractions of the strategy may have been boosted by international developments—as glasnost blossomed in the East, it became easier to envisage the FDP returning to the Social-Liberal orientation.

<sup>33</sup> Minnerup, pp. 3–44.

<sup>34</sup> SPD Parteivorstand, *Entwurf für ein neues Grundsatzprogramm*, p. 20.

## Discipline versus Decentralization

Conflict between leadership autonomy and an ethos of inner-party democracy is endemic to most social-democratic parties. In the SPD, a long tradition of centralized bureaucratic control, and a highly pronounced 'vocation for government' has ensured that the former has invariably prevailed. The revival of the participatory ethos in the seventies was contained relatively easily through the mobilization of the formidable resources of the party elite. However, the victory of discipline and control had its price: organizational sclerosis and the ossification of inner-party life. Ultimately, the 'threat' of the participatory culture associated with the new Left was merely externalized, resurfacing in the eighties in the form of the Greens.

The government vocation of the leadership and its identification with the state was also reflected lower down the party hierarchy. The intimacy of party-state relations in the Federal Republic is particularly pronounced in the SPD. An overrepresentation of civil servants has earned the party the unwelcome sobriquet of *Partei des öffentlichen Diensts* (party of the public service). Moreover, the premium attached to expertise has led to a professionalization of party life. Public administration, law, journalism and the universities are the reservoirs that feed the party hierarchy.

The make-up of the SPD functionary corps varies considerably between local branches and localities. In industrial areas party-office holders are, typically, drawn from the ranks of labour-movement officialdom. In localities dominated by the service sector, the new middle class is dominant. Motivated by a desire for participation, the new members were very successful in acquiring party posts. Although they gave the SPD more of a new-left orientation their assimilation did little to inject a more participatory ethos. Significantly, a decline in SPD membership in 1978-82 was most marked in areas dominated by the new middle class and where the new Left was strongest, as in South Hessen. The profile of lost members here is also revealing: losses were highest amongst the under-thirties, non-union, non-officeholding membership.<sup>35</sup> Thus, even when the SPD had been permeated by the new Left it was ill-equipped to confront the demands for political 'self-realization' articulated by the post-materialist generation.

Organizational sclerosis has been a concern of the party since the late seventies when internal studies found that local branches were self-contained and remote from society, uninterested in local issues, and ineffective at electoral mobilization.<sup>36</sup> However, centre-led attempts to revitalize the grass roots only served to emphasize further the 'top-down' character of the party. This was revealed starkly by the conspicuous lack of involvement by local branches in discussions around the programme review.

The soul-searching of the review stimulated self-criticism within the

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<sup>35</sup> Kolinsky, *Parties, Opponents and Society*, pp. 73-5

<sup>36</sup> Meng, pp. 97-8.

party—'the *unter uns gesagt* [between ourselves] mentality must be overcome'.<sup>37</sup> No aspect of party life was immune; the sterility of the top leadership bodies attracted criticism in the party's weekly press,<sup>38</sup> which was itself criticized for conformity with party orthodoxy.<sup>39</sup> Plagued by steadily falling sales, *Vorwärts* was finally closed down by the party executive, and the SPD now has no newspaper unequivocally identified with it. Some critics advocated a decentralization of the party structure, with a devolution of functions to regional and local levels and a greater measure of autonomy at the base.<sup>40</sup> However, it is hard to see how a meaningful decentralization of structure could be made compatible with the discipline inherent in a party geared to achieving government office. In short, the SPD's dilemma embodies the classic tensions between representative and participatory democracy.

### III A New Electoral Landscape: The Rise of *Die Grünen*

The rise of the Greens heightened the crisis of identity in the SPD. Firstly, a rival on the left forced the party to re-examine its own first principles: 'inevitably the SPD has been drawn into a debate about its own aims and position in German society.'<sup>41</sup> Secondly, the party had to formulate an electoral strategy to restore its hegemony over the Left. Thirdly, since the electoral landscape in the Federal Republic exerts an ineluctable pull towards coalition government, the SPD has been under pressure to define its position in relation to other parties. In short, the Social Democrats have faced the dilemma of whether to seek an opening to the centre or to court the Greens.

At federal level, the response of the SPD leadership to the Green challenge can be divided into three phases. During the period 1980–84, conflict between the 'new politics' Left, around Brandt, and the old-politics Right, inevitably produced a certain ambiguity in relations with the Greens. Brandt advocated the reintegration of the SPD's 'lost children' through a greening of policy and a degree of cooperation with the new party—a strategy geared to the establishment of 'a majority left of the Union parties'. This was resisted by the Right who sought to reaffirm the historic roots of the party in industrial society, and who attacked the Greens as irresponsible Utopians. After 1984, Brandt's vision of the green *Volkspartei* receded somewhat. The SPD now sought to distance itself from the Greens, rejecting any suggestion of cooperation—a strategy taken to its limits in the 1987 election campaign. The objective—'a majority of our own'—was an illusion, however, encouraged by mid-term electoral successes, its strategic bankruptcy being exposed in the election result.

A third phase, adopted immediately thereafter, involved reorientation towards the centre. Tacitly, the SPD appeared to have conceived of an

<sup>37</sup> Peter Glotz, *Wirtschaftswoche*, 29 April 1988.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Conradi, 'Wie wird die SPD geführt?' *Vorwärts*, no. 22, 1987, pp. 16–17.

<sup>39</sup> Sinus-Institut, *SPD Medienstudie*, cited in Michal, *Die SPD*, p. 222.

<sup>40</sup> Lösche, pp. 459–60.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon Smith, 'The Changing West German Party System, Consequences of the 1987 Election', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 2, no. 22, 1987, p. 137.

electoral division of labour that would concede the post-materialist Left to the Greens. Implicit was a less competitive relationship with the new party. Coalition strategy was now geared to acquiring a 'structural majority'. The spread of electoral volatility to the right, the weakening of the CDU-CSU, and the rise of the ultra-right *Republikaner* had opened up the landscape, creating new coalition opportunities. Electoral consolidation would enable the SPD to occupy a pivotal role in coalition-building. In its choice of partner, the party sought to maintain the maximum possible flexibility. Sitting on the fence in relation to the Greens, formerly indicative of a bankrupt strategy, now acquired a semblance of strategic relevance.

Relations between the Social Democrats and the Greens at state and municipal level are rather more complex, being conducted independently of the federal SPD leadership. Coalition behaviour is heavily dependent on the local electoral landscape, and on the composition of the local party. Analysis at these levels reveals very sharply the social and political cleavages in the SPD's membership and functionary corps. Where new-middle-class hegemony in the party organization provides a social base for new-left politics there is a strong inclination towards coalition with the Greens.<sup>42</sup>

Assessments of the experience of red-green coalitions in the *Länder* and municipalities, or of the prospects for similar coalitions at the federal level must be sensitive to the roots of the relationship between the two parties. In particular, a distinction should be made between an opportunistic readiness on the part of the SPD to form ad hoc and pragmatic coalition arrangements where the party landscape allows or even dictates such a course, and a commitment to establishing a stable working relationship with the Greens. Such a commitment entails bridging a wide gulf in terms of programme and organizational style. Analysis of municipal coalitions suggests this is only possible where the new Left is securely dominant in the SPD, where the new politics has been embraced by the local party from an early stage, and where as a consequence there exists a clear-cut preference for a red-green coalition over other available options.<sup>43</sup>

At federal level these conditions have never been present. In the *Länder* the position is more complex. Certainly, the red-green 'experiment' in Hessen (1985-87) was the product of political circumstance, and approached by the SPD from a basically pragmatic perspective. Hessen was in a sense an unlikely setting for a red-green coalition, since the SPD premier, Holger Börner, was strongly identified with the Right, and his previous SPD-FDP administration had been in sharp conflict with the Greens. On the other hand, Börner saw the new coalition as part of a long-term strategy for establishing a credible political alternative to the Conservative-Liberal trend.<sup>44</sup> Although the Hessen experiment was characterized by instability and collapsed in acrimony,

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Scharf, 'Red-Green Coalitions at Local Level in Hessen', in B. Kolinsky, ed., *The Greens in West Germany, Organisation and Policy Making*, Oxford 1989, pp. 139-87.

<sup>43</sup> Scharf, pp. 165-6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

this level of cooperation represents an important testing ground for the red-green axis. The red-green coalition formed in Berlin in Spring 1989 initially appeared more promising than the Hessen experiment because of the more disciplined disposition of the Greens; but with its collapse in November 1990 prospects took a downturn. They were revived, however, by the relaunch of the Hessen coalition after the state election of 1991.

Ambiguity in the attitude of the federal SPD towards the Greens was accentuated by conflicting perspectives amongst the leadership, arising from uncertainty over how to read the logic of electoral and party-system change. On the one hand, there were signs of a two-bloc party system, with a gulf between the parties of the Left and the 'bourgeois parties'. On the other, however, there clearly remained common ground between them, suggesting that a centre-left coalition could be restored. Perhaps most importantly, the electoral arithmetic did not add up to a left majority. In the Bundestag election of 1983 the combined vote of the SPD and the Greens was 43.8 per cent, increasing to 45.3 per cent in 1987. Although the entry into the Bundestag of the *Republikaner* (politically ineligible as coalition partners for the bourgeois parties) might redress the balance, the SPD leadership was unlikely to commit itself to a red-green coalition under these circumstances. It was easier to see the Greens as rivals than as partners; though, as we have seen, this did imply making a programmatic appeal to Green-minded constituencies.

### The Greens 1980-1990

At this point it is appropriate to pause in our account of the rise and fall of the SPD in the years 1945-90 to consider the development of the German Greens in the years 1980-90. The decision to found the Greens in 1980 was the culmination of almost a decade of extraparliamentary activity. The Far Left of the SPD and a number of Maoist groups abandoned their opposition to an ecological perspective (earlier seen as a diversion) given popular opposition to the nuclear-energy programme of the Schmidt government. Disaffected members of the SPD provided most of the organizational skills for the subsequent action. By the late 1970s extraparliamentary opposition seemed unlikely to halt the expansion of nuclear energy, and some began to contemplate running for office at the state level. The decision of a number of right-wing ecological groups to contest state and local elections added further pressure in favour of an electoral strategy. At the federal level potential support had been greatly increased by the dramatic growth in a peace movement attendant upon NATO's adoption of the dual-track resolution which envisaged the large-scale stationing on German soil of cruise and Pershing missiles should the Soviets fail to withdraw their SS20s from Eastern Europe. A more immediate incentive was provided by the first direct election to the European Parliament in 1979. For the Greens, participation held out the promise of enough financial support to maintain a permanent organizational infrastructure, since any party competing would receive DM 3.50 from state subsidies for every vote gained. A federal congress of the Greens was held in Frankfurt in March 1979 at which it was agreed to launch a proto-party, the *Sonstige*

*Politische Vereinigung; Die Grünen* (SPV). To conform with West German electoral law the party elected an executive committee, but no agreement was reached on an electoral programme or a formal organizational framework.

The SPV achieved 3.2 per cent of the vote in the European election, and at a conference in Karlsruhe in January 1980 a decision to form a Green Party was taken by over 90 per cent of the delegates, though it took a further conference at Saarbrücken in March 1980 to adopt an agreed formula. During these discussions the Left—who argued in favour of a party that was both ecological and generally left-wing on other issues—triumphed, and the final programme clearly placed the Greens to the left of the SPD. This outcome forced conservative environmentalists like Herbert Gruhl, an ex-CDU MdB who had been joint chairman of the SPV executive, to withdraw.

The CDU-CSU's choice of Franz Josef Strauss as chancellor candidate in the first federal election contested by the Green Party in 1980 squeezed the latter's vote as many potential voters switched their support to the SPD to help prevent a victory for Strauss. By 1983 the Greens had secured representation in a number of *Länder*, and in the federal election they polled 5.6 per cent of the votes, gaining twenty-seven seats in the Bundestag. In 1987 the party increased its share to 8.3 per cent and secured forty-two seats. In attaining these results the Greens had the support of a relatively stable electorate. Major features were its generational character (under thirty-five), a high level of formal education, a predominantly urban location, and relatively weak integration into the rest of society. The last federal election in 1987 showed a marked decline in the percentage of 18–24 year olds who voted Green, and some have since argued that the Greens represent the revolt of a particular generation rather than a decisive rupture with past values.<sup>45</sup>

The most active members in the Greens had invariably been so in the SPD, where they had attempted to move the party towards the agenda of '1968', only to be checked by the institutional sclerosis referred to earlier. They therefore determined to replace the top-down Bonn-centred model characteristic of the established parties by one centred on the lowest level of the party (*Basis*). 'The central idea is the permanent control of all office and mandate holders and institutions by the grass-roots (openness, time limits on mandates and party offices) and the permanent possibility of recall in order to make organization and politics transparent for all, and to counteract the estrangement of individuals from their grass-roots.'<sup>46</sup> They were also concerned to assert the legitimacy of, and accord an equal place to, extraparlimentary activity, since they did not accept parliament as the dominant locus of power in the Federal Republic.

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<sup>45</sup> W.E. Paterson, 'Environmental Politics', in Smith, Paterson and Merkl, pp. 267–88.

<sup>46</sup> Greens, *Federal Programme*, 1980.



## New Structures, Old Problems

The structures devised by the Greens were novel, and intended to realize three aims: to prevent the emergence of a professional class of politicians and functionaries; to encourage participation; and to reduce drastically the autonomy of the parliamentary elite. The first of these aims was reflected in a number of provisions. Office-holding in the party was unpaid beneath the federal level. Parliamentary representatives were expected only to draw the salary of a skilled worker, with the considerable residue to be paid into party funds during their tenure of office. They were also expected to 'rotate' and make way for a designated successor at the midway point in a legislative session. Participation was to be encouraged by very loose membership structures. All meetings were in principle open and all party members could participate in the conferences. The holding of multiple party offices, widespread in other parties, was expressly forbidden. The autonomy of the group was to be constrained in a number of ways. Rotation was designed to refresh the parliamentary elite from the party base and the new social movements. The key concept, however, was the imperative mandate, a favourite idea of the Left in the SPD in the 1970s, which envisaged that MdBs should be bound by instruction from the local party that had sent them to the legislature.

The Greens' organizational principles represent a very optimistic reading of human nature, and putting them into practice has proved difficult. Rotation proved extremely problematic, though all but Petra Kelly and Gert Bastian—who resigned and rejoined the Greens—were eventually rotated in the Bundestag session 1983–87. Experience showed, however, that once replaced, MdBs rarely rejoined the extraparliamentary struggle. For example, Joschka Fischer, a notably reluctant rotatee, became a driving force to form a coalition between the Greens and the SPD in Hessen. The practice of having both members and their designated successors in the *Fraktion* simultaneously was not a happy one and led to intense rivalries. Rotation was eventually dropped at the federal level, although an expectation remained that members could not serve more than one term without a break. Eleven of the forty-four Green Party representatives in the pre-December 1990 Bundestag were former members. In some areas, like Frankfurt, rotation is still encouraged; in others it is ignored. It also proved difficult for the unpaid executive to control Green deputies who enjoyed the advantages of fully paid support staff. At the Münster Conference in March 1989, it was therefore decided to pay all eleven members of the federal executive, though the level fixed, in conformity with the anti-elitist mood of the party, was below that of parliamentary assistants.<sup>47</sup>

Participation has been no higher in the Greens than in other parties. The loose structures place little premium on joining, and the membership/voter ratio is by far the lowest of the parties in the Bundestag. Surveys also indicate that the proportion of the membership which is active is no greater. The problem of apathy in a 'participatory party' is illustrated by Kolinsky. In 1982, the Hesse *Land* Congress, called to formulate the election programme, was attended by only 80 of the

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<sup>47</sup> *Grüne Blätter*, vol. 4, 1981, p. 18.

2,500 members; moreover 10 of those were members of the *Land* executive.<sup>48</sup> Where Green members do wish to participate, this is often directed to a single issue and direct action. Notably, the major success in terms of participation is the much higher participation by women at all party levels including the *Bundestagsfraktion*.<sup>49</sup> This is discussed in detail below.

The attempt to reduce the autonomy of the parliamentary elite largely failed. The imperative mandate was soon ignored, because, while apparently binding *MdBs* to instructions from the local level, it was quickly perceived that due to the party's heterogeneous nature the instructions would conflict and the *Fraktion* would then be either unable to act or would simply ignore them. In any case, loose conditions for party membership subjects the base of activists to large fluctuations, which clearly militates against a consistent policy of directly accountable representatives. The federal executive was in fairly regular conflict with the *Fraktion* but had little or no success in curbing its autonomy. If anything, the autonomy and weight of the *Fraktion* actually increased as its members gathered experience. Of course, one would expect this in a party where resources and paid jobs are concentrated at the parliamentary level; but it also reflected the declining vitality of the new social movements, especially the peace movement, which lost momentum from the mid eighties, and no longer put the continuous pressure on the *Fraktion* they once did.

### Collective Leadership and the Factional Rift

The Greens have had some success in maintaining a dispersion of power in the party by banning multiple office-holding. Their experiment with collective leadership has not been a happy one however. The party has had no single leader, but rather three chairpersons with equal rights. This practice has served to encourage rather than inhibit factionalism: there is a marked tendency to select those representatives of the most important party factions who continue to give their primary loyalty to their faction rather than to the party.

The recent history of the Greens has been dogged by a running battle between the 'Realos', the pragmatic wing, and the 'Fundis' or fundamentalists, reflecting opposing views on political activity and the party-political system. The realists, whilst not denying the importance of extraparlimentary activity, accorded a much higher place to parliamentary work. They were interested, where possible, in cooperation with the SPD to achieve the adoption of their political goals, and did not exclude the possibility of coalition, initially at *Land* level and then increasingly at the federal level. The fundamentalists were unimpressed by national parliamentary politics, arguing that the real centres of power in the Federal Republic lay outside the Bundestag and the *Länder* parliaments, in the centres of economic power and the bureaucracy. Accordingly, compromises to achieve

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<sup>48</sup> Kolinsky, *Parties, Opposition and Society*, p. 310.

<sup>49</sup> For more detail, see W.B. Paterson, 'The Greens from Yesterday to Tomorrow', in P. Merkl, ed., *The Federal Republic at Party*, New York 1989, pp. 340-66.

parliamentary victories should be avoided since they rest on the illusion that parliament itself is the site of the decisive encounters in an advanced industrial society. The faction was opposed to any arrangement with the SPD, arguing that since the latter's long-term strategy must be to absorb the Greens (drain the Green marshes), the party should not help the SPD to achieve this aim.

The boundary between these positions was not fixed and immutable, and individuals could move from one position to another. The open nature of Green decision-making bodies often meant, moreover, that participation in conferences and meetings changed fairly frequently; as a consequence the balance between the two positions changed from conference to conference. The majority of party members have in fact been Realos, who were also strong in the *Bundestagsfraktion*. The Fundis predominated in some areas, such as Hamburg, and in the executive. The tensions between the federal executive and the *Bundestagsfraktion*, and between the Realos and the Fundis, which had been a feature of the 1983–87 legislative period, grew more intense after the election success of 1987. The federal executive became even more identified with the Fundi wing.

Relations between the two wings deteriorated sharply throughout 1987 until a truce was agreed in December 1987. Jutta Ditfurth was defeated in December 1988 and removed from the party executive. Following the decision of the Green Alternatives in Berlin to form a coalition with the SPD in January 1989, the Realos were in the ascendancy, though the Fundis retained a number of important positions and the general climate remained rancorous. A third group identified with Antje Vollmer attempted to act as mediator. Many predicted a split, but this did not happen. While individual Realos went over to the SPD, the current as a whole was restrained by the knowledge that the Greens would have to clear the 5 per cent threshold. Financial dependence on state electoral subsidies and on the contributions of MdBs to Ecofunds for ecological activism by citizen-initiative groups ensured that the Fundis also had an important stake in parliamentary representation. The real danger was not so much a dramatic split as a deadening combination of inconsistency and immobilism. In the long run this factionalism threatened to provoke the desertion to the SPD of leading Realos like Otto Schily, who stood for the SPD in the 1990 election, and the onset of a downward electoral spiral. Although these evident weaknesses make the realization of any ambitious left project by the Greens unlikely, the party will undoubtedly continue to exert an influence on the German Left in two areas.

The Greens did not develop much of a party press, but their ideas are diffused by a variety of counter-cultural publications, local listings magazines and the *Tageszeitung*—a daily newspaper with a circulation of 100,000. The SPD also lacks media of its own and has had a dismal record with *Vorwärts*. On the other hand, the SPD does publish a good discussion journal, *Die Neue Gesellschaft*, edited by Peter Glotz, and receives support from about fifty trade-union newspapers, which have a circulation of 1.5 million. While the SPD, using state funds earmarked for political research, has built up the Ebert Foundation, with its impressive and far-flung research programmes, the Greens took time

to establish an equivalent, in the shape of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, and do not yet have a similarly consistent body of research bearing on their own project and proposals.

### Women's Issues

Despite the criticisms to be made of the Greens as an organization, the party has nevertheless played a vanguard role with respect to women's issues in contemporary German politics. The centrality of these issues to the party is reflected in a number of ways, not least being the question of participation of women in the party itself. The lists of Green candidates for party and public office are ideally put together on the zip principle—that is, alternating female and male candidates—which was officially adopted at their party conference in May 1986. The policy certainly increased the representation of women—from 35.7 per cent of the 1983 *Bundestagsfraktion* to 57 per cent after the 1987 federal election. This quota has sometimes been exceeded, as in the 1986 Hamburg elections where all the Green candidates were women.

In the membership as a whole every third member is female, as compared with one in four in the established parties. The difference, though, lies less in the total participation rate than in the inversion of the normal rule of West German politics that female participation decreases as one ascends the party pyramid toward Bonn. Female membership in the *Bundestagsfraktion* has been strikingly higher than in the party as a whole: between 1985 and 1987 women held all the leadership positions in the *Fraktion*, and between 1988 and 1990 two-thirds of them. This record is all the more striking given that the almost complete absence of paid posts, apart from in the *Fraktion* itself, has made participation a very costly activity—a factor generally held to affect women more adversely since those who are mothers must invariably pay child-care costs while engaged in political work.

This success has, interestingly enough, been less apparent as an electoral effect. Paradoxically the FDP, which made no concessions towards women's representation, and the CDU-CSU, which made minimal concessions, attracted more female than male voters; whilst the SPD, which made considerable efforts to increase female representation, including a commitment to the introduction of the quota principle, and the Greens who made it a central organizational principle, both attracted more male than female voters in the 1987 election. However, the Greens did make significant gains in a key target group of women aged between twenty-five and forty-five, with a striking gain of 7 per cent among those between thirty-five and forty-five.

## IV The Bombshell of Unification

The issue of German unification dominated the federal election of 2 December 1990. It is as well to remember that before the extraordinary events of late 1989 the most likely outcome had seemed a continuation in power of the present ruling CDU-CSU and FDP coalition, though there were uncertainties related to the degree to which the *Republikaner* would take votes from the bourgeois parties. Despite

Chancellor Kohl's personal low standing in the opinion polls, the Left seemed unlikely to make great advances given the steady upturn in the West German economy and the anticipated benefits of the tax reform, timed to bear fruit towards the end of the electoral cycle.

This scenario momentarily appeared to be called into question by the unravelling of events in the GDR and on the plane of German-German relations. As the drama unfolded it seemed just possible that 'the wild card' could lead to real gains by the SPD, or push the FDP to break with its coalition partner. But as it turned out, almost every section of the SPD and of the West German Left felt profoundly ambivalent about the prospect of unification—a feeling shared, interestingly enough, by trade-union organizers and intellectuals, reds and greens, functionaries and activists, Realos and Fundis. On the other hand, Kohl and Genscher acted swiftly to take advantage of the openings offered by the movement in East Germany.

The SPD had been more deeply affected by the division of Germany than the other Bonn parties, and in the period before the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 it had continually insisted on the lack of legitimacy of the GDR and seen itself as the major spokesman for reunification. The building of the Wall appeared to demonstrate that a policy of all-out hostility to the GDR would not precipitate its collapse but rather cause the GDR regime to restrict further the opportunities for communication between the two Germanies. The SPD policy, very much identified with Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr, became 'change through rapprochement', where the West Germans would try to persuade the GDR government to improve the conditions of its people, especially in the areas of human rights and freedom of movement, in return for West German acceptance of the status quo. This policy was extended in the 1980s by what is sometimes called a second Ostpolitik of active engagement with the governments of the GDR in pursuit of detente; and the SPD signed a number of agreements on chemical weapons with the GDR.<sup>20</sup>

In September 1989, as events gathered pace, the SPD leadership cancelled at short notice a routine exchange visit with its SED counterparts. Within the Federal Republic Oskar Lafontaine made himself a leader of opinion that was critical of pan-German aspirations. He had at various times suggested a revision of the German Nationality law, which in effect operated as a 'law of return' on the Israeli model, in favour of an emphasis on the separate citizenship of the GDR and the FRG. Lafontaine was also constantly critical of the social costs imposed on the Federal Republic by the inflow of 'ethnic Germans' from Eastern Europe encouraged by the Federal government.

In the early phase of the break-up of the Honecker regime, the running in East Germany was made by intellectuals and dissidents loosely grouped in the New Forum, whose aim was to reform the GDR rather than to demand unity with the Federal Republic. The West German

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<sup>20</sup> See W.E. Paterson, 'Foreign and Security Policy', in Smith, Paterson and Merkl, pp. 192–210.

Left sympathized with this approach. But the momentum of the popular movement revealed a widespread aspiration to join up with the West. The opening of the Hungarian and Czech borders, and popular enthusiasm for unity expressed in growing mass demonstrations, especially in Leipzig, created inexorable pressures for unification.

The SPD in East Germany began to form itself only in October 1989 but soon attracted a body of support. However, from the beginning there existed a mismatch between the aspirations of the new members of the East German SPD, who were keen to press ahead to unity, and the Federal SPD, which was still uncertain of its response. A strong current of opinion in the West German party suggested it would be better to stabilize the GDR, since unity in the prevailing circumstances would simply amount to an extension of the Federal Republic. At the SPD's Congress in December 1989 Willy Brandt pleaded with the party to accept a wholehearted commitment to German unity. While the principle was accepted, the practical difficulties continued to be stressed by the chancellor candidate, Lafontaine. The Greens, often accused by conservative opponents of being German nationalists, found it more difficult to develop a policy. They had close relations with many of those represented in New Forum, and most Green statements dwelt on the difficulties of unity. Their loose decision-making structure also made it more difficult for them to effect a rapid and comprehensive change of strategy than it was for the SPD.

Against expectations, the German issue at first looked set to work out well for the SPD. Lafontaine did not appear to suffer from his lack of enthusiasm for German unity, at least in the West, and it seemed that his views on the social costs, which also echoed those of the West German trade unions, might strike a chord with the electorate. Within the GDR events also looked to be going the SPD's way. The party had its founding congress (23–25 February 1990) and most early polls put it in a very strong position for the election of 18 March, with some predicting a majority.

#### The Price of SPD Ambivalence

The result, however, confounded such expectations, with a resounding success for the *Allianz für Deutschland*. Comprised of three independent parties—the East German CDU, *Demokratischer Aufbruch* (Democratic Awakening), and the *Deutsche Soziale Union* (German Social Union)—the Alliance was strongly identified with the West German conservative parties and the chancellor. Together these parties polled 48.1 per cent of the vote. As former members of the East German governing coalition, the Christian Democrats had the advantage of a strong party apparatus. With the SED (Communist Party) successor, the *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (Democratic Socialist Party, PDS) polling an unexpectedly high 16.3 per cent, the SPD was confined to 21.8 per cent. In large part the vote for the Alliance parties was a vote for immediate reunification on the terms set out by the West German government (including a virtual promise of currency union at a highly favourable exchange rate of 1:1). The result showed that the historic roots of social democracy in eastern Germany had been seriously eroded over sixty

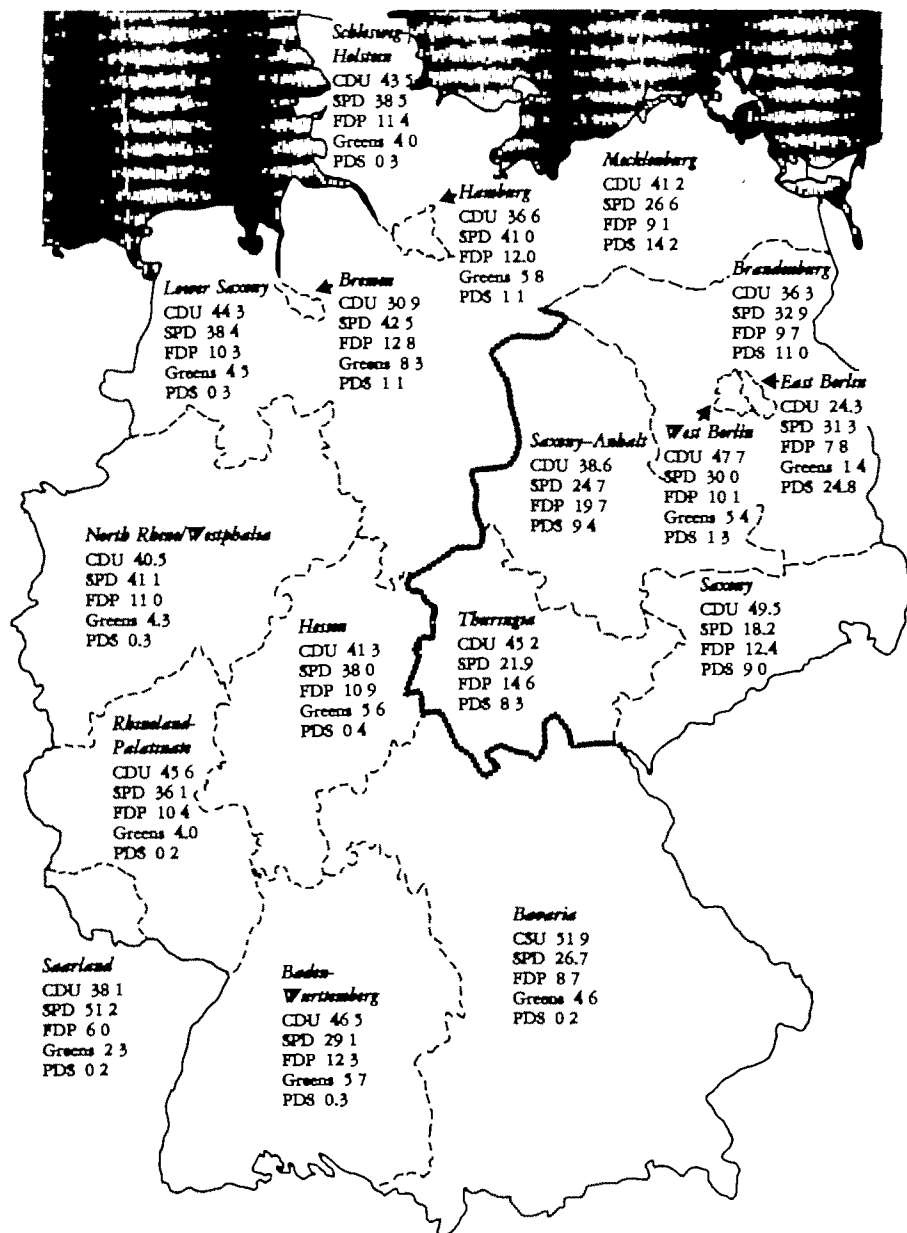
years, and that the advantage the SPD hoped to derive from this source was illusory. Analysis of the voting tends to confirm this conclusion, with a very high concentration of Alliance support (55 per cent) amongst manual workers.

Moreover, the SPD's ambivalence towards reunification could be perceived as simply an exercise in political opportunism. The issue came to a head in June 1990 over whether the SPD should support the inter-German State Treaty, the instrument of currency, and of economic, social and environmental integration. To oppose currency union on the basis that a 1:1 exchange rate contained economic risks was thought to have popular resonance in the West, since polls showed such fears to be widespread. On the other hand, opposition to the Treaty could be seen as undermining national purposes on an issue of historic moment. It would also create doubt in the East as to the SPD's priorities and intentions. At one point the SPD argued that elections in the West should precede unification; so it may at this point have been mainly orienting itself to the preoccupations of the Western electorate. At all events, the State Treaty publicly divided the party. Oskar Lafontaine advocated opposition to the Treaty in its given form, but party chairman Vogel, and economic spokesman Wolfgang Roth saw this as a mistake. The outcome of the conflict was a defeat for Lafontaine, underlined by the subsequent designation of Vogel as chairman of the 'new' all-German party. The episode inevitably undermined Lafontaine in the run-up to the December election, and suggested the party was divided and uncertain.

The SPD had hoped that its support for detente would become increasingly popular as Gorbachev set out to dismantle the Cold War. But they had reckoned without the time bomb of the unification issue. Within the NATO alliance the Kohl government urged a positive response to Soviet overtures. As mass civic opposition surfaced in the East, Kohl found that the historic Christian Democrat commitment to eventual reunification returned to the field of practical politics. As the chancellor could move decisively to do a deal with Gorbachev, he could also oblige the Bundesbank to fall in with a form of currency union that would consolidate Christian Democrat support in the East. The SPD was left appearing to carp and criticize a unification policy that could be presented as simultaneously generous and responsible, acceptable to the 'international community', and legitimately satisfying to the long-divided German nation. While the Left inclined to suspicions of nationalist sentiment, for many voters unification was, quite simply, a family matter. Perhaps the SPD, given its commitment to securing reforms from the federal state, was bound to feel more tied to existing structures than the bourgeois parties, linked as they are to the more mobile propensities of business enterprise.

The position of the SPD continued to deteriorate after their defeat in the East German election of March 1990, due in no small part to disarray over unification issues. For the German Left, the all-German election of December 1990 was to be a disaster. The only qualification to Kohl's triumph was that he had to share it with Geneser, his Foreign Minister and the leader of the FDP. The SPD vote fell to 33.5

## Results of Bundestag Election 2 December 1990 by Länder (%)



### Overall result:

CDU-CSU	43.8
SPD	33.5
FDP	11.0
Greens	3.9
PDS	2.4



per cent (35.9 per cent in the West; 23.6 per cent in the East). Its performance in the industrial areas of the five new *Länder*, and in its erstwhile strongholds in the industrial Ruhr region, was particularly disturbing. The Greens in the West polled 4.7 per cent, short of the 5 per cent required to qualify for representation in the Bundestag. In the five new *Länder*, the Greens (together with Bündnis 90) secured 5.9 per cent of the vote, giving them eight Bundestag seats. Under the new electoral law (amended for this election by the Federal Constitutional Court) Bundestag representation depended on winning 5 per cent of votes cast in *either* the *Länder* of the old Federal Republic *or* in the five new *Länder*. If the Greens in the West had not rejected the option of merging with their Eastern counterparts they would have qualified for representation on the basis of a joint list. The PDS, although polling only 2.4 per cent of the vote overall, won seventeen Bundestag seats by virtue of their poll of 9.9 per cent in the five new *Länder*. Despite being dogged by scandals, this party did attract support from some younger voters and found an able new leader in Gregor Gysi, who had acted as a lawyer for oppositionists in the days of the departed GDR. However, the SPD is very hostile to the PDS, because of the latter's roots in the SED. This party reflects the memories of East German Social Democrats and partly their Western counterparts' determination to avoid any confusion between social democracy and Stalinism. The presence of the PDS in the newly elected Bundestag thus adds a new dimension to the Left's fragmentation. By contrast the Free Democrats and Christian Democrats have so far been able to take over, without public embarrassment, large numbers of party members and much valuable property from the former East German Christian Democratic and Free Democratic parties, the junior allies of Honecker. Indeed the East German members now comprise a majority in the FPD.

## V A New *Volkspartei* for the Nineties?

The SPD remains a powerful political force in Germany, Europe's largest and richest state. In the past it has resourcefully adapted to seemingly adverse new conditions. But in the wake of the December 1990 election the party faces a profound challenge. It was a party that had negotiated a superb adaptation to the Federal Republic of the epoch of the economic miracle. Between 1965 and 1975 party membership grew from 710,000 to 998,000 to make the SPD the largest party in Germany. In 1985, it remained high at over 900,000. The SPD founded its own version of the *Volkspartei*, it pioneered Ostpolitik, and in the eighties even made a stab at taking Green politics on board. But in the fateful year of unification, as circumstance changed with bewildering speed, it became the victim of its earlier success. The party's characteristic policies no longer provided the guidance it needed. The perceived conflict between social solidarity and individual achievement undermined its electoral performance in the eighties. The SPD could still offer solutions that attracted support in the socially deprived rust-belt states. The values of social solidarity (however ill-defined) were the residue of the SPD's origins in the class politics of industrial society, and symbolic of the party's relationship to the labour movement. As such they remain central to the party's identity. But there was a growing belief in the SPD that the

redefinition of social democracy in response to modernity and mass affluence required the reformulation of these values in new terms. Tentative steps in this direction were taken in the 1984–89 programme review.

The conflict between individual achievement and social solidarity taxed the ingenuity of Oskar Lafontaine. At a programmatic level Lafontaine, urged on by his economic adviser Fritz Scharpf, has been the most prominent advocate of labour-market deregulation and an emphasis on individual achievement; but, as minister-president of Saarland, he has been adept at continuing to secure huge federal subsidies for the region's uneconomic mines and steelworks. This inconsistency reflected the difficulty of coming to terms with one of the central dilemmas of social-democratic politics. Lafontaine recently indicated his wish to stand down as chancellor candidate and may be replaced by Engholm, but the Saarlander could again seek centre stage if a favourable opportunity arises.

The SPD of the eighties worked out a response to the Greens that should stand it in good stead, though it will certainly need to be further developed. The party responded to the Green agenda with a commitment to phase out nuclear energy and a programme for the ecological renewal and modernization of the economy. The theme of ecological renewal commands increased force in the context of the environmental hazards of East German industry, and provides plausible opportunities for resolving some of its employment dilemmas. Moreover, at municipal and *Land* levels in the Federal Republic, a *modus operandi* for red-green cooperation still exists. However, the electoral collapse of the Greens reduces the pressure on the SPD, and may weaken the Left inside the party. On one occasion Lafontaine argued that the SPD should drive the Greens out of parliamentary politics by adopting some of their policies and attracting their supporters. With much help from the factional Greens themselves, this is one goal he did achieve in the otherwise disastrous December election. Although greatly weakened, the class basis of the SPD does still give the party a stable core around which other politics can develop. The party's link with organized labour has, perhaps, helped it to absorb what it wished of the new politics and to eclipse the Greens. Though it should be added that, for their part, the Green Fundis welcome the fact that the parliamentary distraction is now largely removed and they can devote themselves to the campaigns to which they always favoured giving priority.

With the party system and electoral dispositions in a state of flux, the SPD will maintain the option of exploiting openings to the centre as well as to the left. The FDP is now in a stronger position following its good showing in the election. But there are dangers if tactical dexterity assumes priority over electoral realignment, programmatic redefinition and organizational reconstruction. In the long term these are tasks the SPD must confront if it is to reassert itself as a potential party of government.

The advent of a unified Germany brought new allies to the Greens; this allows them at least indirect representation in the Bundestag. But

Bundnis 90, a civic-action group stemming from the former East German opposition, may have different concerns from the Western Greens. A further question raised is that the relatively harsh economic conditions in East Germany may make it barren territory for post-materialist values. The SPD's ideas for ecological renewal of industry seem a more plausible way of dealing with the appalling environmental problems of the GDR than Green ideas of an alternative economy. Moreover, in the new *Länder* the PDS has emerged as a third force on the Left at the expense of the Greens.

Ultimately, the prospects for the SPD and the German Left will depend on the speed with which the East German economy can be integrated with that of the West and brought up to West German levels of performance. Kohl was widely perceived in the East as promising that this could and would be done, with all necessary assistance from the Federal authorities; but he also assured the Western electorate that the process would not involve serious dislocation and higher taxes. The SPD could regain support if the chancellor fails to make good on these promises. By the beginning of 1991 unemployment in the East had reached nearly 800,000 or 8.9 per cent of the labour force, with nearly two million on short-time working and several hundreds of thousands looking for work in the West. The Federal government has refused support to many public services in the East. These problems have already provoked grass-roots resistance from a newly independent labour movement with almost daily strikes and demonstrations. The SPD clearly has a good chance of canalizing this discontent. The Metalworkers' Union has seen its membership rise from 2.5 to 3.5 million as it has won new members in the East. As Kohl is forced to raise taxes, the SPD could also regain support among the Western electorate. But like other parties the SPD will have to be careful to ensure that its message in the West does not undercut support in the East. It will also face competition in the new *Länder*, notably from the PDS and the FDP, both of which have a larger apparatus and membership there than the newly launched Social Democrats. The East German Greens and Bundnis 90 may also find ways of extending their support.

It remains just possible that within a couple of years the unavoidable problems of transition will be overcome and a second German economic miracle be in the making. Barring some deep-seated convulsion that would force the FDP to break with its coalition partners, Kohl has about three years in which to consolidate the new hegemony of the German Right, one which combines the gains of the eighties with the fruits of unification. The SPD has even less time to reinvent itself as the *Volkspartei* of the nineties, able to speak to both East and West, and with an appeal both to labour and to the post-materialist middle class. There can be no doubt that in their very different ways the old Left and the new Left of the former West Germany, the SPD and the Greens, have experienced abrupt fluctuations in their fortunes. The SPD is now in government in eight of the sixteen *Länder* of the new German state. And the fact remains that with or without alliance to other forces on the left, the SPD remains central to any alternative in Europe's largest and richest state.

## Political Generations in Federal Germany

We are not free—we have only been freed.

Erich Kastner, *The Little Freedom*

Insight into a particular generation is best gained by comparing it with others.\* The generation that came of age in the late sixties—the so-called ‘‘68 generation’—is widely believed to have had an unparalleled influence on postwar Germany. I do not share this view. Examination of all the generations since 1945 produces a much more complicated conclusion. Let us begin with the ‘front-line generation’.

The first generation of Social Democrats to emerge in West Germany after the war was strongly affected by the war experience. These individuals’ view of socialism was frequently based on an emotional framework that can only be understood in terms of an ideal of a ‘brotherhood of the trenches’ that spanned class boundaries. This group, of course, included the founding generation of the Socialist German Students’ Association, or SDS. In other words, the core of the first SDS generation was made up not of resistance fighters but for the most part of former soldiers and officers who had served at the front. Their lives—both in and out of uniform—had been shaped by day-to-day life in a regimented, militarized society and their collective experience of war. A longing for peace, a deep-seated scepticism toward any kind of nationalism, fear of emotion and mass mentality in the political sphere, relatively little interest in sophisticated social theories, and few emotional ties to the traditional values, symbols and customs of the earlier workers’ movement—all of these were and remain today the heterogenous marks of the SDS cohort’s consciousness.

This is a generation made up primarily of loners who were shaped by their experiences in modern warfare. In spite of—and in opposition to—the dominant mood of resignation and conservatism at the post-1945 universities, the roughly eight hundred SDS members in their ‘shabby officers’ greatcoats’ (as Helmut Schmidt put it)

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\* This article is based on a paper given at the Centre for European Studies, Harvard University.

embraced the social democracy of Kurt Schumacher—at a time when most students were rejecting politics, and the middle classes and rural population were looking to a short-lived religious revival to help them deal with the downfall of the German Reich.

On 10 September 1986, in his farewell address to the German Bundestag, Helmut Schmidt underscored once more the seminal experiences of the war and the Nazi period, and the mind-set of the founders of the SDS, which was typical of their generation as a whole. 'When the war was over, I shared the emotions of millions of other German soldiers. With enormous relief, we said "Thank God, it's over". During the war millions of us found ourselves in a schizophrenic situation. During the day we were fighting, partly because we saw it as our duty, partly to save our own lives, partly to keep from being taken prisoner; but at night we were fervently hoping for an end to the war and the Nazi dictatorship—schizophrenic.' Even if this view was shared only by a minority of Helmut Schmidt's generation, it does show that for his contemporaries war and National Socialism were an experience full of contradiction. Even today this experience has not relaxed its hold on them. This is the generation that put its stamp on mainstream politics in the sixties and seventies. And one should not forget that the conflict in 1967 and 1968 was waged primarily between this group and the '68 generation. (In addition to Helmut Schmidt, this SDS founder generation includes Hans Matthöfer, Heinz-Joachim Heydorn, Horst Ehmke, Peter von Örtzen, Karl Wittrock, Jan van Nes Ziegler and Wolfgang Zeidler.) Of a total of seven top SDS officials during the initial phase, two went on to notable party careers: one became Federal Chancellor; the other was, until May of 1985, president of the *Land* parliament of North Rhine/Westphalia. A third was president of the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe; another became president of the Federal Court of Audit. Of the remaining three, two later went into careers in education.

### The Hitler Youth Generation

And now, briefly, the second generation: I call it the 'Hitler Youth generation'. This SDS group of the 1950s was largely overshadowed by its predecessors; as we see, it is not a new phenomenon for one generation to be eclipsed by another. It was not Auschwitz or Stalingrad that shaped the behaviour and thinking of this cohort, but the child-rearing methods and rituals of the National Socialists. One of the goals of the Nazi educational system was to produce a *Volks*-oriented population of loyal followers. In every sphere of life the aim was to remove any division between state and society. Peter Schneider, a member of the '68 generation, recently pointed out in an essay entitled 'Im Todeskreis der Schuld' ('In the Deathly Circle of Guilt') something we have also heard from critical thinkers of the Hitler Youth generation: they by no means experienced the Nazi years as 'years of terror'. Instead, as Schneider puts it, 'These were years when young people were able to play at being grown up, years of camaraderie, of a sense of belonging to a group, of adventure. Unless their parents were anti-fascist, these young people had an enjoyable

youth during those years... This generation, unlike adults of that time, did not end up paying for their enthusiasm. They were, of course, too young to experience the horrors of the winter campaign [on the Eastern Front], too young to spend years in a Siberian prisoner-of-war camp, too young for the disgrace of denazification. Those who experienced the last year of the war in an anti-aircraft unit or as part of the *Volkesturm* were hardly able to view the end of the dream as anything but a natural disaster.' This, however, did not apply to the young people from Central or Eastern Europe who fled from East Prussia, Pomerania or elsewhere to the West. It was of no little importance where and under what circumstances a particular individual was living in 1944 and 1945. So one cannot expect that the entire Hitler Youth generation was shaped by common experience. When in times of great upheaval a homogeneous sociocultural environment is shattered the members of a given generation may react by developing quite different mentalities. All the same, Peter Schneider's description holds for a large part of the West German Hitler Youth generation: their consciousness has in many cases been informed by a youth under the Nazi regime—with which they have still not come to terms, but which they experienced as happy. This generation, which in my opinion has cast no significant intellectual shadow, includes most of the men who today occupy positions of power in the Federal Republic—a fact generally overlooked, even by the '68 generation. The prototype of this generation, which frequently exhibits no more than formally democratic thinking, is Helmut Kohl. It would, however, be a mistake to see him in isolation; witness Dr Philipp Jenninger. The most prominent characteristic of this generation is its organizational capabilities. In the camps of the Hitler Youth and the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, its counterpart girls' organization, young people learned above all how to organize. When the food supply declined dramatically after the war, these talents stood them in good stead in the black market and in foraging for food. Put simply, this generation was also intellectually unexceptional within the SDS. Its members steered the group toward the right. The Cold War, of course, did not stop in the 1950s at the university gates.

It was precisely this generation, however, that spoke out against a resurgence of nationalism and racism. How much unreconstructed anti-Semitism remained among the urban middle classes in West Germany, despite Germany's defeat in the war, is evident when one remembers the pogrom-like atmosphere in Freiburg, Frankfurt am Main, Bonn, Münster, Göttingen and Marburg; in the spring of 1952 these universities' SDS groups attempted—together with the Catholic and Protestant student groups, the Falken group, and the trade unions' youth group—to prevent a showing of Veit Harlan's film *Hanna Ammon*. (Veit Harlan was responsible for the Third Reich's inflammatory anti-Semitic film *Jud Süß*.) The demonstrators were met with verbal abuse, shouts of 'Jew hoodlums', 'Heil Hitler' and 'East German pigs', some were physically attacked. Instead of protecting the students from the rabid mob, the police went after them with clubs and arrested both protesting students and union activists.

Although the SDS organized a number of nationwide conferences in the 1950s, the socialist students of that time were quite atheoretical in their orientation. However, contradictory elements—such as a great enthusiasm for Europe, a desire for clear delimitation vis-à-vis communists, and a growing generational conflict within the Social Democratic Party (SPD)—as well as the beginnings of a consistent university policy, accompanied the SDS's turn to the right during the first half of the 1950s. The organization leaned toward the majority right-wing in domestic policy; in foreign policy, however, most of the SDS still supported the so-called 'pan-German options'. Exclusive ties with the West had not yet become the accepted SPD position.

Not until Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno returned to the University of Frankfurt in the summer of 1950 did West Germany again have a focus of social criticism. These exponents of the Frankfurt School, returning to their home city, were to have a substantial effect on socialist students. The analysis of Nazism developed at the New York Institute for Social Research, for example, soon became part of the theoretical core of many university SDS groups. As a whole, however, the SDS in its second phase remained basically a *party-loyalist Social-Democratic student organization* with clearly federalist organizational structures. In contrast to the time of the founders, only very few of the top SDS officials in the second half of the 1950s went on to pursue a successful political career in the Social Democratic Party.

Five years after the war ended, on 17 June 1950, delegates from sixty-five student organizations from all the universities and technical colleges of the Federal Republic and West Berlin re-established the *Deutsche Burschenschaft*, a 'German fraternity', under the campaign slogan 'Honour, Freedom, Fatherland'. By 1957 the proportion of male students at academic institutions who were fraternity members had risen again to 30 per cent, most of them at small and medium-sized institutions. Even after Hitler, then, and despite Stalingrad, a large number of middle-class young people rejected the left-wing, continuing to take a 'without me' stance. They had been disappointed by the Nazis; when they saw the Christian Democrats gaining middle-class strength with their Western orientation and their support for rearmament and rebuilding middle-class society, a majority of these young people joined the Christian Democrat and Christian Social Parties (CDU-CSU). (Richard von Weizsäcker seems to me to be the prototype of this group; he joined the Christian Democrats in 1954.)

### The Anti-Nuclear Generation

Let us now consider the third generation, a group I call the 'anti-nuclear generation'. It is they who took the SDS in a new direction at the end of the 1950s. Although the US Air Force had destroyed Japan's Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the beginning of August 1945, and the Soviet government, too, had the bomb by July of 1949, the problem of nuclear weapons initially played only a minor role in the arms debate in the Federal Republic. It was not until mobile hydrogen bombs had

been detonated—by the United States in November of 1952 and by the Soviet Union in August 1953—that the West German people belatedly became conscious of this issue. One of the Federal Republic's most important political events in this connection was the Göttingen declaration drawn up by eighteen prominent West German nuclear researchers during the second half of the 1950s. They issued an alarm in direct response to Konrad Adenauer's statement at a press conference on 5 April 1957, in which he said, 'Let's distinguish between tactical and strategic nuclear weapons. Tactical weapons are no more than an advanced kind of artillery. Of course our Federal troops must keep pace with the newest development in conventional weapons.' Adenauer's comment was shocking proof that power in the Federal Republic was wielded by conservative old men who no longer knew what they were talking about. The 'Göttingen Eighteen' tried unsuccessfully to make the appropriate Christian Democratic politicians aware of the facts and their responsibility, pointing out that 'Tactical nuclear weapons have the destructive force of normal nuclear weapons. Today a tactical nuclear weapon can destroy a small city; a hydrogen bomb can render an area the size of the Ruhr region temporarily uninhabitable.' Otto Brenner, chairman of the largest single trade union in the world, the metalworkers' union IG Metall, threw his support behind the scientists. He observed, 'A military policy of would-be greatness in the Federal Republic will solve none of our problems.' Although, according to a survey conducted by the Emnid Institute in 1957, 77 per cent of Germans opposed the deployment of US nuclear weapons on West German soil, the CDU and CSU, which supported such deployment, won the third Bundestag election on 15 September 1957 with 50.2 per cent of the vote. In this situation, one might have expected socialist intellectuals to analyse why the Social Democrats had not succeeded in translating the people's anxiety about nuclear weapons into votes for their party.

To be sure, a large majority of the people were, in abstract terms, opposed to bombs like the one that destroyed Hiroshima. What the Social Democrats failed to recognize, however, was that it was a different matter entirely for these people to imagine what it might mean for them personally, in Essen or Dortmund, to perish instantaneously or, if they survived, to see their children born perhaps without a mouth or a brain. It was only logical that this unimaginable horror would have no concrete effect on voting behaviour; or, paradoxically, the voters may have tended to identify those warning of danger with the danger itself. Accordingly, the voters fled to that refuge against such unpleasantness, the idyllic West German home, and voted for the Christian Democrats.

Germany's recent history again caught up with the Federal Republic when swastikas appeared in Cologne on 24 December 1959. Two 25-year-old members of the 'German Reich Party' smeared black paint on Cologne's synagogue and on the memorial to the victims of National Socialism at the city's Hansaring. Early January 1960 brought more neo-fascist and anti-Semitic slogans in Hamburg, Bremen, Dortmund, Northern Bavaria, Rhineland-Palatinate, Braunschweig and Coburg. The coalition government of the Christian Democratic,



Christian Social and Free Democratic parties feared foreign-policy difficulties arising from these anti-Semitic incidents. Not least to offset the expected loss of international favour, an all-party coalition, joined by the Social Democrats, introduced into the schools a new requirement, social-studies classes, and sent out a call for political scientists and sociologists. The hope was that critical intellectuals in Frankfurt and Berlin might be able to take on the difficult task of a democratic enlightenment of young people, if possible outside the political arena rather than in the glare of public attention.

Not until this point did an undogmatic leftist majority group emerge within the SDS, assuming the organization's leadership in the summer of 1959 at the Göttingen delegates' conference. The images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were deeply imprinted on the minds and hearts of this third generation. Against the backdrop of the nuclear threat, the students sought *new political solutions*. It was clear to the Social Democrats' executive committee that the majority of the third SDS generation rejected a thesis put forth by sociologist Helmut Schelsky that West German society was a 'homogeneous middle-class society', a thesis forming the foundation for the Godesberg party platform. By splitting the SDS and establishing a party-line 'Social Democratic University Association', or SHB, the 'Godesberger' aligned with Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt and Herbert Wehner in the Social Democratic executive committee tried to block further theoretical discussion of the abstractions on which the new Social Democratic policy programme was based. This programme, however, was conceived, written and pushed through by Willi Eichler and the Nelson group. In the end, the SDS lost only about a hundred members to this split. Much more serious was the loss of numerous contacts between the students' organization and the party at the regional level. To be sure, the SDS had always been ultimately an *autonomous* organization of students, but nonetheless it continued to view itself as an integral part of the social-democratic sphere.

However, through the splitting-off of the SHB in May 1960, and the exclusion of a number of pacifist, pro-communist 'Konkret' group members, the SDS managed to build a solid theoretical and political foundation, something it had never achieved before. At the beginning of the sixties the SDS was able to unite three usually contradictory elements: the experience of exclusion, a sense of rebellious subjectivity, and a strong intellectual curiosity. This is an important factor in comprehending the reasons for the revolt that came later. A resolution issued in November of 1961, declaring membership of the Social Democratic Party to be incompatible with SDS membership (or its sponsor organization), marked the beginning of a development that led ultimately to Willy Brandt's ill-advised consent to the so-called *Radikalerlass*. This resolution, passed by the minister-presidents of the federal *Länder* on 28 February 1972, excluded 'radicals' from a wide range of public positions. A *tendency towards exclusion*, which culminated in the 'German autumn' of 1977 in an attempt to criminalize the undogmatic left wing, resulted when the Social Democratic Party leadership under Herbert Wehner withdrew into itself, shutting out the world. It was accompanied by a lack of interest in

critical social theory. (This point, by the way, was directly and self-critically addressed by the party leadership when it reversed the 1961 resolution on 31 May 1981.)

At the beginning of the 1960s, some twenty SDS university groups began—quietly, at first—to re-examine largely forgotten leftist theories and utopian ideas from the Weimar Republic. In most of the university towns, this rediscovery of the SDS's theoretical heritage was influenced by so-called *Ortsgeister*, or 'local spirits'. (These 'local spirits', who put their mark on the theoretical and intellectual substance of the individual SDS university groups for years to follow, included not only Willy Huhn [Berlin], Fritz Lamm [Stuttgart], Leo Kofler [Cologne], Wolfgang Abendroth [Marburg], Erich Gerlach and Peter von Örtzen [Göttingen], Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer [Frankfurt], and in the 1960s Ernst Bloch [Tübingen], but also Michael Mauke, the former SDS member from Berlin, and several others.) Theoretical discussions and a variety of industrial-sociological considerations resulted in both an intellectual time-lag and a wide range of political views in the organization as a whole. The third and particularly the fourth SDS generation encompassed leftist socialists, unionists and anarchists, as well as Soviet-style and party communists. The latter two groups, however, never became more than a minority. All of us shared a theoretical interest in the objective and subjective state in which the working class found itself. In particular, the new, undogmatic leftist majority within the organization urged closer cooperation between the SDS and the industrial unions.

### The Rebellious Generation

Finally, we come to the last SDS generation, which I call the 'rebellious generation'. Starting in the mid 1960s, the SDS began concentrating on mobilizing students against the planned state-of-emergency legislation, the influence of the Springer press, and the unsavoury war being fought by the United States in Vietnam. Unlike the youth movement before and after the First World War—the *Wandervogel* at the turn of the century and the *Brüdische Jugend* during the Weimar Republic—the anti-authoritarian student rebellion of the 1960s was a manifestation of generational conflict that led to social consequences. (The *Wandervogel* group, in contrast, helped middle-class young people voice a decidedly apolitical protest against the adult world, the stalematedness of Wilhelmine society, and blind obedience; and youth organizations in the 1920s ultimately remained alienated from the spirit of the republic and the growing problems of an industrialized society.)

The SDS was no more and no less than the interpreter for the student rebellion—in the words of Antonio Gramsci, it was its 'organic theoretician'. SDS members gave voice to the protesting students' needs, demands and new kinds of action, and established an independent line of communication among the various universities, academic spheres and intellectual centres. To this end, the SDS executive drew up a publicly effective conference policy, as well as a radical-democratic-alliance concept encompassing also the second SHB generation. Finally, they developed a vigorous university programme

with everything from seminar discussions to alternative courses of study, and put forward the proposal of a critical and political university as a concrete alternative to the prevalent academic factory. New kinds of communication and solidarity were tested at sit-ins, teach-ins and demonstrations. Before long, however, the politicized students, particularly in Berlin and Frankfurt, the two cities governed by the Social Democrats, found themselves in constant conflict with the local SPD politicians. A turning point in the history of the student protest movement came when Benno Ohnesorg, a student at the Free University of Berlin, was shot on 2 June 1967, while demonstrating against the Shah of Iran. Ohnesorg's death set off escalating violence and counter-violence between the state and the students. The spark of rebellion leapt from Berlin to the universities of West Germany.

During the fifties, the left wing had remained an isolated fringe group within the student body as a whole—similar to the position of the Christian Democrats' student group RCDS in the 1960s. This minority status, I think, helps to explain the actions of the SDS toward the end of the 1960s. We continued to think of ourselves as a minority long after we had become the majority. In the end, we were never able emotionally and intellectually to deal with our new majority position. We always felt ourselves to be on the losing side, even when we had actually left others far behind us. Today one often hears about the tremendous cultural impact this generation has had, and how much it changed the Federal Republic. This is doubtless true. Yet, at the time, it did not feel as though we were making history. Instead, we saw ourselves as an excluded generation. This political and psychological aspect became apparent, for example, when, following Benno Ohnesorg's funeral on 9 June 1967 in Hanover, a discussion was held by over seven thousand students from practically every West German university about the circumstances and organization of the resistance. This, incidentally, was the first time the SDS succeeded in showing its intellectual range. The federalistic internal structure of the organization made it possible for numerous analysts and speakers to emerge from the roughly twenty university groups. When the Frankfurt sociologist Jürgen Habermas not only criticized 'legal terror' in West Berlin, but went on to denounce the 'voluntarist ideology' of Rudi Dutschke as 'left-wing fascism', the SDS members present came together in a theoretical phalanx. They were concerned no longer with the complicated issue of to what extent, even in highly industrialized countries, violence can sometimes be a positive thing, but instead only with showing solidarity with Rudi Dutschke. About ten members from Hanover, Frankfurt and Berlin who agitatedly took the floor, spontaneously defended Dutschke, despite their differing theoretical views. Hans-Jürgen Krahl of Frankfurt, as well as the long-time SDS members Klaus Meschkat and Ulrich K. Preuss, for example, spoke up in spite of age and theoretical differences in defence of the Berlin SDS group, which along with Dutschke had been charged with flirting with violence and promoting policies that would inevitably claim further victims. This spontaneous solidarity, however, prevented any critical or analytical examination of the events in Berlin. Once more, two sometimes competing tendencies emerged simultaneously: the contribution of local thinking in

discussing opposing viewpoints, and a wave of solidarity set off by acute fear of mainstream exclusion. Despite its achievements through extra-parliamentary action—a surprise to all concerned—the SDS lost its self-confidence in Hanover.

Debate with the established Social Democratic Party increasingly gave way to polemics and open hostility. This development, furthermore, was helped along by the Berlin Senate's Social Democratic group, which was quick to comment that the murder victim had brought his fate upon himself. It made a deep impression on my generation when we saw established politicians in June of 1967 turning victims into criminals; they proved neither able nor willing to recognize their own part in the escalation of domestic political hostilities. This self-righteousness, by the way, was not limited to the Social Democrats.

After Rudi Dutschke was critically wounded on 11 April 1968, by three shots fired by the labourer Josef Bachmann, the Berlin SDS distributed a flier that laconically noted, 'Whether or not Rudi was the victim of a political conspiracy, it is clear that this crime is a result of the systematic and escalating campaign waged by the Springer press and the Berlin Senate against the democratic forces in this city.' Rudi Dutschke died on 24 December 1979, of causes related to the 1968 attempt on his life.

### The Radical Bequest

There is no doubt that the anti-authoritarian student rebellion had a profound effect on the Federal Republic's political culture during the 1960s. It had an effect perhaps comparable to that of Willy Brandt's policy of reconciliation with Eastern Europe. One of the paradoxes of the second German republic is that it was precisely the excluded socialist students and the Social Democratic establishment, which excluded them on its way to becoming the governing party, that together, despite their differences, succeeded in changing the authoritarian, subservient mind-set prevalent among Germans even after 1945. An important intellectual precondition for this change in thinking was the renaissance in classical theories from the workers', women's and youth movements, from Karl Marx to Wilhelm Reich—a renaissance that took place in the universities often against the bitter opposition of establishment Social Democrats. For a long time it seemed that the Social Democrats after Godesberg had become afraid of their own ideals and utopian models.

The sixties rebellion bequeathed a new awareness of the Third World, the emergence of anti-authoritarianism among large numbers of young people, and—not least—a growing sensitivity to the unequal situation of women. While the new women's movement did not emerge directly from the anti-authoritarian rebellion, there is no denying that the new social movements would hardly have had as much of a chance in West German society had it not been for the student protest movement. Willy Brandt was certainly correct in pointing out that many of the students politicized by the extra-

parliamentary opposition later (temporarily) became part of the SPD. However, this is not true of most of the third- and fourth-generation SDS. The majority of the student movement's activists did not, following the disintegration of the SDS and its self-proclaimed Maoist *spontaneistisch* successor organizations, join other political groups—whether the Social Democratic party or the various alternative and 'Green' groups. One explanation lies in the fact that for the large majority of the third- and fourth-generation SDS those few years of rebellion represented such an intense process of political education and individual development that everyday politics came to seem dull and lifeless. By the late eighties, many former SDS activists were to be found not where one might expect to find them—in the ranks of the Greens or SPD—but rather in the offices of publishing houses, magazines, television studios and academic life. The pursuit of big ideas or big deals was for them more interesting than provincial politics.

Yet this did not at all mean that the SDS activists had completely failed. Quite the contrary. The generation of 1968 in West Germany changed the political culture very successfully. As a result of the revolt there was reform and expansion of the education system; a growth in grass-roots democracy; a wide range of Third World solidarity actions; the renaissance of Western Marxism in an anti-Stalinist tradition; and a continued left-orientation amongst the West German intelligentsia. Even after the collapse of the Honecker regime in the GDR this critical Marxist tradition is still alive in the old New Left of West Germany. And the intellectual impulses of the 'critical theory' of Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas, and the anti-authoritarian motive of the late-sixties, influenced the political thinking of the Greens, the Social Democrats and the new women's movement. The peace movement and the anti-nuclear movement acquired a mass following, attracting a new generation and influencing the established parties. The emergence of the Greens and of a 'new left' in the SPD certainly received impulses from the sixties generation; in this sense the figure of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the sixties rebel who became deputy mayor of Frankfurt's 'red-green' coalition, is symbolic. West Germany's new policy towards the USSR in the time of Gorbachev, and its acceptance of the German Polish border—which acknowledged the loss of nearly one third of German territory after World War II—were partly influenced by the student movement's confrontation on the issues of Nazism and Germany's responsibility for the two world wars. One of the main aims of the SDS was to make manifest the latent violence of daily life in the two post-war Germanys. And in this respect, the anti-authoritarian movement of '68 was quite a success. The peace and civil-rights movements, and the different environmental groups in East Germany, took up this way of thinking and revolted against the authoritarian structure of the SED regime. The ex-East German migrant, Rudi Dutschke, always a supporter of unification, returned to his native land.

The breach of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 shed a searching light on all the generations we have discussed. For understandable reasons the sixties generation on both sides of the wall turned

their faces away from the popular movement for unification. In part this was because they had grown up in a divided Germany and had simply come to accept it. They wanted democratization in the East but not assimilation by the West. Many foreign commentators wrongly saw the West German peace movement and its East German civic counterparts as bearers of a new German nationalism. In reality this generation of radicals was formed by a belief that the sins of Nazism meant that Germany could not and should not aspire to national unification, and certainly should not again become a great power. West German radical opinion could sympathize with civic-rights movements in the East such as New Forum but not with the crowds in Leipzig.

The reaction to unification of the new leaders of the SPD, the so-called *Enkel* or grandchildren, was surprisingly cautious. Oskar Lafontaine, never an SDS activist, shares the political culture of the sixties generation to which he belongs. He had brought to the leadership of his party a brilliant eclecticism, able to synthesize the aspirations of diverse strata in the West German electorate and connect them with at least some elements of radical critique, such as the demand for a shorter working week. But the *Enkel* were fundamentally pragmatic politicians attached to the familiar state structures they knew how to manipulate. Their outlook lacked the theoretical consistency and breadth of the slightly older Peter Glotz. Glotz, as SPD general-secretary in the mid eighties, had urged the party to a pan-European manifesto that addressed the challenge of new technology and of the new social movements. Despite their presentational skills, the *Enkel* also lacked the depth and experience of the party's elder statesmen, notably Brandt, Matthöfer and Örtzen.

When the unification dynamic of the popular movement in the East became clear, it was Brandt who first grasped its immediate political implications. He had known a more-or-less united Germany and could see beyond the horizons of the Federal Republic. Yet none of the Social Democrats were as bold as Chancellor Kohl who, untroubled by any angst with regard to Germany's past, acted with consummate opportunism throughout the unification process. The mass of German people, East and West, saw unification as a family affair and could not share the ulterior thoughts of the radical intellectuals. Oskar Lafontaine very properly warned of the cost of unification and of the demagogy of Kohl, but he failed to respond with generosity to the movement of the Easterners or the sympathy of the Westerners. The more understanding position of Brandt and others could not repair the position and the SPD suffered a serious defeat.

In early 1991, with unification achieved, a new threshold has been reached. In Leipzig, tens of thousands demonstrated against the failure of the Federal government to fulfil its promises to the East. Meanwhile in the West, the radical generations we have surveyed turned out in large numbers to protest against the US war of annihilation waged against Iraq and the disregard of Shiite and Kurdish opposition.

## *Realpolitik in the Gulf*

On the morning before Yom Kippur late this past September, I found myself standing at the western end of the White House, watching as the colour guard paraded the flag of the United States (and the republic for which it stands) along with that of the Emirate of Kuwait.\* The young men of George Bush's palace guard made a brave showing, but their immaculate uniforms and webbing could do little but summon the discomfiting contrasting image—marching across our TV screens nightly—of their hot, thirsty, encumbered brothers and sisters in the Saudi Arabian desert. I looked away and had my attention fixed by a cortege of limousines turning in at the gate. There was a quick flash of dark beard and white teeth, between burnoose and kaffiyeh, as Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, the exiled Kuwaiti emir, scuttled past a clutch of photographers and through the portals. End of photo op, but not of story.

Let us imagine a photograph of the emir of Kuwait entering the White House, and let us see it as a historian might years from now. What might such a picture disclose under analysis? How did this oleaginous monarch, whose very name was unknown just weeks before to most members of the Bush administration and the Congress, never mind most newspaper editors, reporters and their readers, become a crucial visitor—perhaps *the* crucial visitor—on the President's autumn calendar? How did he emerge as someone on whose behalf the President was preparing to go to war? We know already, as every historian will, that the President, in having the emir come by, was not concerned with dispelling any impression that he was the one who had 'lost Kuwait' to Iraq in early August. The tiny kingdom had never been understood as 'ours' to lose, as far as the American people and their representatives knew. Those few citizens who did know Kuwait (human-rights monitors, scholars, foreign correspondents) knew it was held together by a relatively loose yet unmistakably persistent form of feudalism. It could have been 'lost' only by its sole owners, the Al-Sabah family, not by the United States or by the 'free world'. What a historian might make of our imaginary photo document of this moment in diplomatic history that most citizens surely would not is

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that it is, in fact, less a discreet snapshot than a still from an epic movie—a dark and bloody farce, one that chronicles the past two decades of US involvement in the Persian Gulf. Call the film *Rules of the Game of Nations or Metternich of Arabia*—you get the idea. In this particular scene, the President was meeting at the White House with the emir to send a 'signal' to Iraqi president Saddam Hussein that he, Bush, 'stood with' Kuwait in wanting Iraq to pull out its troops. After the meeting, Bush emerged to meet the press, not alone but with his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft. This, of course, was a signal, too: Bush meant business, of a potentially military kind. In the game of nations, however, one does not come right out and say one is signalling (that would, by definition, no longer be signalling); one waits for reporters to ask about signals, one denies signalling is going on, and then one trusts that unnamed White House aides and State Department officials will provide the desired 'spin' and perceptions of 'tilt'.

On ordinary days the trivial and empty language of Washington isn't especially awful. The drizzle of repetitive key words—'perception', 'agenda', 'address', 'concern', 'process', 'bipartisan'—does its job of masking and dulling reality. But on this rather important day in an altogether unprecedented process—a lengthy and deliberate preparation for a full-scale ground and air war in a faraway region—there was not a word from George Bush—not a word—that marched the occasion. Instead, citizens and soldiers alike would read or hear inane questions from reporters, followed by boilerplate answers from their President and interpretations by his aides, about whether the drop-by of a feudal potentate had or had not signalled this or that intent. There is a rank offence here to the idea of measure and proportion. Great matters of power and principle are in play, and there does in fact exist a chance to evolve a new standard for international relations rather than persist in the old follies of superpower *raisons d'état*; and still the official tongue stammers and barks. Behind all the precious, brittle, Beltway in-talk lies the only idea young Americans will die for in the desert: the idea that in matters of foreign policy, even in a democratic republic, the rule is 'leave it to us'. Not everybody, after all, can be fitted out with the wildly expensive stealth equipment that the political priesthood requires to relay and decipher the signal flow.

### The Legacy of Kissinger

The word concocted in the nineteenth century for this process—the shorthand of Palmerston and Metternich—was 'realpolitik'. Maxims of cynicism and realism—to the effect that great states have no permanent friends or permanent principles, but only permanent interests—became common currency in post-Napoleonic Europe. Well, there isn't a soul today in Washington who doesn't pride himself on the purity of his realpolitik. And an organization supposedly devoted to the study and promulgation of such nineteenth-century realism—the firm of Henry Kissinger Associates—has furnished the Bush administration with several of its high officers, including Brent Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, along with much of its expertise.



Realpolitik, with its tilts and signals, is believed by the faithful to keep nations from war, balancing the powers and interests, as they say. Is what we are witnessing in the Persian Gulf, then, the breakdown and failure of realpolitik? Well, yes and no. Yes, in the sense that American troops have been called upon to restore the balance that existed before 2 August 1990. But that regional status quo has for the past two decades known scarcely a day of peace—in the Persian Gulf, it has been a balance of terror for a long time. Realpolitik, as practised by Washington, has played no small part in this grim situation. To even begin to understand this, one must get beyond today's tilts and signals and attempt to grasp a bit of history—something the realpoliticians are loath for you to do. History is for those clutching values and seeking truths; realpolitik has little time for such sentiment. The world, after all, is a cold place requiring hard calculation, detachment.

Leafing through the history of Washington's contemporary involvement in the Gulf, one might begin to imagine the cool detachment in 1972 of arch-realpolitician Henry Kissinger, then national security adviser to Richard Nixon. I have before me as I write a copy of the report of the House Select Committee on Intelligence Activities chaired by Congressman Otis Pike, completed in January 1976, partially leaked, and then censored by the White House and the CIA. The committee found that in 1972 Kissinger had met with the Shah of Iran, who solicited his aid in destabilizing the Ba'athist regime of Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr in Baghdad. Iraq had given refuge to the then-exiled Ayatollah Khomeini and used anti-imperialist rhetoric while coveting Iran's Arabic-speaking Khuzistan region. The Shah and Kissinger agreed that Iraq was upsetting the balance in the Gulf; a way to restore the balance—or, anyway, to find some new balance—was to send a signal by supporting the landless, luckless Kurds, then in revolt in northern Iraq.

Kissinger put the idea to Nixon, who loved (and loves still) the game of nations and who had already decided to tilt toward Iran and build it into his most powerful regional friend, replete with arms purchased from US manufacturers—not unlike Saudi Arabia today, but more on that later. Nixon authorized a covert-action budget and sent John Connally, his former treasury secretary, to Teheran to cement the deal. (So the practice of conducting American Middle East policy by way of the freemasonry of the shady oilmen did not originate with James Baker or George Bush. As the US ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, confided to Saddam Hussein in her now-famous meeting last 25 July, almost as though giving a thumbnail profile of her bosses: 'We have many Americans who would like to see the price go above \$25 because they come from oil-producing states.' Much more later on *that* tête-à-tête.)

The principal finding of the Pike Commission, in its study of US covert intervention in Iraq and Iran in the early 1970s, is a clue to a good deal of what has happened since. The committee members found, to their evident shock, the following: 'Documents in the Committee's possession clearly show that the President, Dr Kissinger and the foreign head of state [the Shah] hoped that our clients [the Kurds]

would not prevail. They preferred instead that the insurgents simply continue a level of hostilities sufficient to sap the resources of our ally's neighbouring country [Iraq]. Official prose in Washington can possess a horror and immediacy of its own, as is shown by the sentence that follows: 'This policy was not imparted to our clients, who were encouraged to continue fighting.' 'Not imparted.' 'Not *imparted*' to the desperate Kurdish villagers to whom Kissinger's envoys came with outstretched hands and practised grins. 'Not imparted', either, to the American public or to Congress. 'Imparted', though, to the Shah and to Saddam Hussein (then the Ba'athists' number-two man), who met and signed a treaty temporarily ending their border dispute in 1975—thus restoring balance in the region. On that very day, all US aid to the Kurds was terminated—a decision that, of course, 'imparted' itself to Saddam. On the next day he launched a search-and-destroy operation in Kurdistan that has been going on ever since and that, in the town of Halabja in 1988, made history by marking the first use of chemical weaponry by a state against its own citizens.

By the by, which realpolitician was it who became director of the CIA in the period—January 1976—when the Kurdish operation was being hastily interred, the Kurds themselves were being mopped up by Saddam, and the Pike Commission report was restricted? He happens to be the same man who now wants you to believe Saddam is suddenly 'worse than Hitler'. But forget it; everybody else has.

### Tilts and Signals

Something of the same application of superpower divide-and-rule principles—no war but no peace, low-intensity violence yielding no clear victor or loser, the United States striving for a policy of Mutual Assured Destabilization—seems to turn up in Persian Gulf history once again four years later. Only now the United States has tilted away from Iran and is signalling Saddam Hussein. Iranians of all factions are convinced that the United States actively encouraged Iraq to attack their country on 22 September 1980. It remains unclear exactly what the US role was in this invasion; but there is ample evidence of the presence of our old friends, wink and nod.

Recently, I raised the matter of September 1980 tilts and signals with Admiral Stansfield Turner, who was CIA director at the time, and with Gary Sick, who then had responsibility for Gulf policy at the National Security Council. Admiral Turner did not, he said, have any evidence that the Iraqis had cleared their invasion of Iran with Washington. He could say, however, that the CIA had known of an impending invasion and had advised President Jimmy Carter accordingly. Sick recalled that Iraq and the United States had broken diplomatic relations in 1967 during the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, so that no official channels of communication were available. Such contact as there was, Sick told me, ran through Saudi Arabia and, interestingly enough, Kuwait. This, if anything, gave greater scope to those who like dealing in tilts and signals. Prominent among them was realpol (by way of Trilateralism) Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was then Carter's national security adviser. As Sick put it: 'After the hostages were

taken in Teheran [in November 1979], there was a very strong view, especially from Brzezinski, that in effect Iran should be punished from all sides. He made public statements to the effect that he would not mind an Iraqi move against Iran.' An Autumn 1980 story in London's *Financial Times* took things a little further, reporting that US intelligence and satellite data—data purporting to show that Iranian forces would swiftly crack—had been made available to Saddam through third-party Arab governments.

All the available evidence, in other words, points in a single direction. The United States knew that Iraq was planning an assault on a neighbouring country and, at the very least, took no steps to prevent it. For purposes of comparison, imagine Washington's response if Saddam Hussein had launched an attack when the Shah ruled Iran. Or, to bring matters up to date, ask yourself why Iraq's 1980 assault was not a violation of international law or an act of naked aggression that 'would not stand'. Sick cautioned me not to push the evidence too far because, as he said, the actual scale of the invasion came as a surprise. 'We didn't think he'd take all of Khuzistan in 1980', he said of Saddam. But nobody is suggesting that anyone expected an outright Iraqi victory. By switching sides, and by supplying arms to both belligerents over the next decade, the US national security establishment may have been acting consistently rather than inconsistently. A market for weaponry, the opening of avenues of influence, the creation of super-power dependency, the development of clientele among the national security forces of other nations, and a veto on the emergence of any rival power—these were the tempting prizes.

How else to explain the simultaneous cossetting of both Iran and Iraq during the 1980s? The backstairs dealing with the Ayatollah is a matter of record. The adoption of Saddam Hussein by the power worshippers and influence peddlers of Washington, D.C. is less well remembered. How many daily readers of the *New York Times* recall that paper's 1975 characterization of Iraq as 'pragmatic, cooperative', with credit for this shift going to Saddam's 'personal strength'? How many lobbyists and arms peddlers spent how many evenings during the eighties at the Washington dinner table of Iraq's US ambassador, Nizar Hamdoun? And how often, do you imagine, was Hamdoun asked even the most delicately phrased question about his government's continued killing of the Kurds, including unarmed women and children; its jailing and routine torturing of political prisoners during the 1980s; its taste for the summary trial and swift execution?

It can be amusing to look up some of Saddam's former fans. Allow me to open for you the 27 April 1987 issue of *The New Republic*, where we find an essay engagingly entitled 'Back Iraq', by Daniel Pipes and Laurie Mylroie. These two distinguished Establishment interpreters, under the unavoidable subtitle 'It's time for a US "tilt"', managed to anticipate the recent crisis by more than three years. Sadly, they got the name of the enemy wrong: 'The fall of the existing regime in Iraq would enormously enhance Iranian influence, endanger the supply of oil, threaten pro-American regimes throughout the area, and upset the Arab-Israeli balance.' But they always say that, don't they, when the

think tanks start thinking tanks? I could go on, but mercy forbids—though neither mercy nor modesty has inhibited Pipes from now advocating, in stridently similar terms, the prompt obliteration of all works of man in Iraq.

Even as the Iraqi ambassador in Washington was cutting lucrative swaths through 'the procurement community', and our policy intellectuals were convincing one another that Saddam Hussein could be what the Shah had been until he suddenly was not, other forces (nod, wink) were engaged in bribing Iran and irritating Iraq. Take the diary entry for 15 May 1986, made by Oliver North in his later-subpoenaed notebook. The childish scrawl reads:

- Vaughan Forrest
- Gene Wheatin w/Forrest
- SAT flights to
- Rob/Flacko disc. of Remington
- Sarkis/Cunningham/Cline/Secord
- Close to Sen. Hugh Scott
- TF 157, Wilson, Terpil et al blew up Letter
- Cunningham running guns to Baghdad for CIA, then weaps, to Teheran

This tabulation contains the names of almost every senior Middle East gunrunner. The penultimate line is especially interesting, I think, because it so succinctly evokes the 'two track' balancing act under way in Iran and Iraq. That tens of thousands of young Arabs and Persians were actually dying on the battlefield... but forget that too.

We now understand from sworn testimony that when North and Robert McFarlane, President Reagan's former national security adviser, went with cake and Bible to Teheran in May 1986, they were pressed by their Iranian hosts to secure the release of militant Shiite prisoners held in Kuwait. Their freedom had been the price demanded by those who held American hostages in Beirut. Speaking with the authority of his president, North agreed with the Iranians, explaining later that 'there is a need for a non-hostile regime in Baghdad' and noting that the Iranians knew 'we can bring our influence to bear with certain friendly Arab nations' to get rid of Saddam Hussein. Bringing influence to bear, North entered into a negotiation on the hostage exchange, the disclosure of which, Reagan's secretary of state George Shultz said later, 'made me sick to my stomach'. North met the Kuwaiti foreign minister and later told the Iranians that the Shiite prisoners in Kuwait would be released if Iran dropped its support for groups hostile to the emir. When Saddam learned of the deed, which took place at the height of his war with Iran, he must have been quite fascinated.

It's at about this point, I suspect, that eyes start to glaze, consciences start to coarsen, and people start to talk about 'ropes and sand' and the general impenetrability of the Muslim mind. This reaction is very convenient to those who hope to keep the waters muddy. It is quite clear that Saddam Hussein had by the late 1980s learned, or been taught, two things. The first is that the United States will intrigue against him when he is weak. The second is that it will grovel before

him when he is strong. The all-important corollary is: The United States is a country that deals only in furtive signals.

### Saddam Quits the Game

It is against this backdrop—one of signals and nods and tilts and intrigues—and *not* against that of Bush's anger at Iraqi aggression (he is angry, but only because realpolitik has failed him) that one must read the now-famous transcript of the Glaspie-Saddam meeting last July. Keep in mind, too, that at this point, just a bit more than a week before Iraqi troops marched into Kuwait, Glaspie is speaking under instructions, and the soon-to-be 'Butcher of Baghdad' is still 'Mr President'. The transcript has seventeen pages. For the first eight and a half of these, Saddam Hussein orates without interruption. He makes his needs and desires very plain in the matter of Kuwait, adding two things that haven't been noticed in the general dismay over the document. First, he borrows the method of a Coppola godfather to remind Glaspie that the United States has shown sympathy in the near past for his land and oil complaints against Kuwait: 'In 1974, I met with Idriss, the son of Mullah Mustafa Barzani [the Kurdish leader]. He sat in the same seat as you are sitting now. He came asking me to postpone implementation of autonomy in Iraqi Kurdistan, which was agreed on March 11, 1970. My reply was: We are determined to fulfil our obligation. You also have to stick to your agreement.' After carrying on in this vein, and making it clear that Kuwait may go the way of Kurdistan, Saddam closes by saying he hopes that President Bush will read the transcript himself, 'and will not leave it in the hands of a gang in the State Department. I exclude the secretary of state and [Assistant Secretary of State John] Kelly, because I know him and I exchanged views with him.'

Now, the very first thing that Ambassador Glaspie says, in a recorded discussion that Saddam Hussein has announced he wishes relayed directly to the White House and the non-gang elements at Foggy Bottom, is this: 'I clearly understand your message. We studied history at school. They taught us to say freedom or death. I think you know well that we as a people have our experience with the colonialists.' The confused semiotics of American diplomacy seem to have compelled Glaspie to say that she gets his 'message' (or signal) rather than that she simply understands him. But the 'message' she *conveys* in that last sentence is surely as intriguing as the message she receives. She is saying that she realizes (as many Americans are finally beginning to) that one large problem with the anomalous borders of the Gulf is the fact that they were drawn to an obsolete British colonial diagram. That fact has been the essence of Iraq's grudge against Kuwait at least since 1961. For Saddam Hussein, who has been agitating against 'the colonialists' for most of his life, the American ambassador's invocation of Patrick Henry in this context had to be more than he hoped for. But wait. She goes even further to assure him: 'We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait. I was in the American embassy in Kuwait during the late sixties. The instruction we had during this period was that we should express no opinion on this issue, and that the issue is not associated

with America. *James Baker has directed our official spokesmen to emphasize this instruction [italics mine.]*

I used slightly to know Ambassador Glaspie, who is exactly the type of foreign-service idealist and professional that a man like James Baker does not deserve to have in his employ. Like Saddam, Baker obviously felt more comfortable with John Kelly as head of his Middle East department. And why shouldn't he? Kelly had shown the relevant qualities of sinuous, turncoat adaptability—acting as a 'privacy channel' worker for Oliver North while ostensibly US ambassador to Beirut and drawing a public reprimand from George Shultz for double-crossing his department and his undertaking, to say nothing of helping to trade the American hostages in that city. Raw talent of this kind—a man to do business with—evidently does not go unnoticed in either the Bush or Saddam administration. Baker did not have even the dignity of a Shultz when, appearing on a Sunday morning talk show shortly after the Iraqi invasion, he softly disowned Glaspie by saying that his clear instructions to her in a difficult embassy at a crucial time were among 'probably 312,000 cables or so that go out under my name'. Throughout, the secretary has been as gallant as he has been honest.

The significant detail in Ambassador Glaspie's much more candid post-invasion interview with the *New York Times* was the disclosure that 'we never expected they would take all of Kuwait'. This will, I hope, remind you that Gary Sick and his Carter-team colleagues did not think Iraq would take all of Iran's Khuzistan region. And those with a medium-term grasp of history might recall as well how General Alexander Haig was disconcerted by General Ariel Sharon's 1982 dash beyond the agreed-upon southern portion of Lebanon all the way to Beirut. In the world of realpolitik there is always the risk that those signalled will see nothing but green lights.

A revised border with Kuwait was self-evidently part of the price that Washington had agreed to pay in its long-standing effort to make a pet of Saddam Hussein. Yet ever since the fateful day when he too greedily took Washington at its word, and the emir of Kuwait and his extended family were unfeelingly translated from yacht people to boat people, Washington has been waffling about the rights of the Kuwaiti (and now, after all these years, Kurdish) victims. Let the record show, via the Glaspie transcript, that the Bush administration had a chance to consider these rights and these peoples in advance, and coldly abandoned them.

And may George Bush someday understand that a president cannot confect a principled call to war—'hostages', 'Hitler', 'ruthless dictator', 'naked aggression'—when matters of principle have never been the issue for him and his type. On 2 August Saddam Hussein opted out of the game of nations. He'd had enough. As he told Glaspie: 'These better [US-Iraqi] relations have suffered from various rifts. The worst of these was in 1986, only two years after establishing relations, with what was known as Irangate, which happened during the year that Iran occupied [Iraq's] Fao peninsula.' Saddam quit the

game—he'd had it with tilt and signal—and the President got so mad he could kill and, with young American men and women as his proxies, be killed.

### A New Tilt

Today, the tilt is toward Saudi Arabia. A huge net of bases and garrisons has been thrown over the Kingdom of Saud, with a bonanza in military sales and a windfall (for some) in oil prices to accompany it. This tilt, too, has its destabilizing potential. But the tilt also has its compensations, not the least being that the realpoliticians might still get to call the global shots from Washington. Having taken the diplomatic lead, engineered the UN Security Council resolutions, pressured the Saudis to let in foreign troops, committed the bulk of these troops, and established itself as the only credible source of intelligence and interpretation of Iraqi plans and mood, the Bush administration publicly hailed a new multilateralism. Privately, Washington's realpols gloated: *We* were the superpower—*Deutsche* marks and *yen* be damned.

Generally, it must be said that realpolitik has been better at dividing than at ruling. Take it as a whole since Kissinger called on the Shah in 1972, and see what the harvest has been. The Kurds have been further dispossessed, further reduced in population, and made the targets of chemical experiments. Perhaps half a million Iraqi and Iranian lives have been expended to no purpose on and around the Fao peninsula. The Iraqis have ingested (or engulfed) Kuwait. The Syrians, aided by an anti-Iraqi subvention from Washington, have now ingested Lebanon. The Israeli millennialists are bent on ingesting the West Bank and Gaza. In every country mentioned, furthermore, the forces of secularism, democracy and reform have been dealt appalling blows. And all of these crimes and blunders will necessitate future wars.

That is what US policy has done, or helped to do, to the region. What has the same policy done to America? A review of the Pike Commission, the Iran-Contra hearings, even the Tower Report and September's perfunctory House inquiry into the Baker-Kelly-Glaspie fiasco, will disclose the damage done by official lying, by hostage trading, by covert arms sales, by the culture of secrecy, and by the habit of including foreign despots in meetings and decisions that are kept secret from American citizens. The Gulf build-up had by Election Day brought about the renewal of a moribund consensus on national security, the disappearance of the bruited 'peace dividend' ('If you're looking for it,' one Pentagon official told a reporter this past autumn, 'it just left for Saudi Arabia'), and the re-establishment of the red alert as the preferred device for communicating between Washington and the people.

The confrontation that opened on the Kuwaiti border in August 1990 was neither the first nor the last battle in a long war, but it was a battle that now directly, overtly involved and engaged the American public and American personnel. The call was to an exercise in peace through strength. But the cause was yet another move in the policy of keeping

a region divided and embittered, and therefore accessible to the franchisers of weaponry and the owners of black gold.

An earlier regional player, Benjamin Disraeli, once sarcastically remarked that you could tell a weak government by its eagerness to resort to strong measures. The Bush administration uses strong measures to ensure weak government abroad and has enfeebled democratic government at home. The reasoned objection must be that this is a dangerous and dishonourable pursuit, in which the wealthy gamblers have become much too accustomed to paying their bad debts with the blood of others.

December 1990

### Afterword: *La Guerre Est Finie?*

The foregoing essay was written during the months of October and November 1990, and published in time for the New Year. I have resisted any temptation to amend or emend it in the light of later events. If any reader should feel that it survives better than some rival coverage of the conflict as it impended, this could only be because it concentrated on the political and imperial dimension and avoided making apocalyptic predictions about the scale and intensity of a putative 'ground war'. There never seemed any reasonable doubt of the military outcome of any contest between the world's only superpower and a mediocre regional despotism: future historians may be assigned the task of analysing the workings of 'threat inflation' (a phrase I annex from Andrew Cockburn) in presenting Iraq as a ruthless power equipped with all the apparatus of mass destruction. At the close of the conflict around Kuwait City, the Pentagon spokesman General Richard Neal made the coy admission that: 'We might have created a picture that they had a better capability than they really possessed.' The March 1991 issue of *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* was also a little behind the curve (to borrow General Neal's argot) in publishing an authoritative article disproving claims about Saddam Hussein's possession of a thermonuclear device or even the means of acquiring one.

Politically, this overconcentration upon military and technological speculation had the effect of creating a bizarre symbiosis. The United States peace movement, in effect, demanded of the Bush administration that it keep American 'body bag' casualties low. This at least was a problem to which technology did supply an answer, and it was arranged that all casualties, military and civilian, were inflicted upon Iraq. That these casualties may number as many as 120,000 dead has not weighed—in view of the general relief at the handful of American and European deaths—as heavily as perhaps it might have done. The pen of a Mark Twain or H.L. Mencken is needed to describe the atmosphere of sanctimony and triumphalism that has resulted.

When writing my essay, I had not read Scott Armstrong's important article in the *Washington Post* of 1 November 1981. This with



extraordinary prescience gave the background to the Reagan administration's early decision to sell Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) planes to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A core quotation from the article discloses its importance: "The stage is set, according to an internal Pentagon paper and other sources, for a region-wide air defense network, led by Saudi Arabia and potentially including such moderate states as Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar. According to US diplomatic and military sources, as well as an authoritative foreign official, the Saudi-US arrangement has evolved during highly sensitive discussions over the last two years: a complex plan to help Saudi Arabia construct military facilities with a sophisticated electronic command system that could be the nerve centre for US forces.' Saudi allocations of between \$35 and \$60 billion were reported to be set aside for the plan, which was discussed in detail by Major General Richard Secord, then deputy assistant secretary of defence for the Middle East, formerly trainer of the Shah's air force and later indicted for his part in the Iran-contra connection. (It is also interesting to note that the then-obscure officer named Oliver North received a decoration for his part in helping Ronald Reagan steer the AWACS plan through Congress without troubling to disclose its full extent.) Suggestively, it was admitted by Robert Komer, the Vietnam strategist who had designed the Rapid Deployment Force for President Carter, that 'No country in the region is prepared to accept US forces in peacetime.'

Had I read this germinal article by Armstrong (who went on to found Washington's National Security Archive) I would have been able to make a stronger connection between the diagram of politics disclosed by the Iran-contra revelations, and the unfolding of the Gulf crisis. It would also have been easier to highlight the obvious fact that, by the speed and scale of its response in August 1990, the United States was clearly activating a long-rehearsed plan for the region. Only days after the formal acceptance by Iraq of conditions of capitulation, Defence Secretary Richard Cheney made a major speech in which he announced that American forces were in the Gulf to stay.

We now know that the dates for an air war in mid January and a ground offensive for mid February were set by George Bush and his advisors on 30 October 1990 (see *New York Times*, front page, 3 March 1991). This, in retrospect, helps explain the dogged fashion in which Washington resisted all settlement of the crisis short of war. (See also Noam Chomsky's meticulous analysis of US counter-diplomacy in a special supplement of *Z* magazine for Spring 1991). Additional light is shed on the same quarter by a report in the *New York Times* for 23 February 1991 which stated: 'When Mr Bush, in his first months in office, ordered a review of national security policy, Pentagon and CIA officials warned that the United States must deal with Third World threats unambiguously. "In cases where the US confronts much weaker enemies, our challenge will be not simply to defeat them, but to defeat them decisively and rapidly", the national security review concluded. "For small countries hostile to us, bleeding our forces in protracted or indecisive conflict or embarrassing us by inflicting damage on some conspicuous element of our forces may be victory

enough, and could undercut political support for US efforts against them."'' This might go some way to explain the decision of George Bush to rebuff the Gorbachev-brokered acceptance by Iraq of the principal United Nations resolution 660, on 21 February. Acceptance of this—two great powers agreeing on a regional solution short of war—was what many meant by a 'New World Order'. But by then, the issue had become one of demonstrating sole, unambivalent super-power presence—a demonstration that was conducted with chilling effect by the remorseless strafing of retreating Iraqi forces and the unforgettable slaughter at Mutlaa.

This still left the problem of 'tilting' the regional balance of power. As Saddam's forces fell back, a Shia Muslim rising began in the southern towns and cities. It enjoyed the open and stated support of the authorities in Iran, and where it was coordinated it seemed to reflect the influence of the Al-Dawa party: the very organization with which Colonel North had implicitly been treating five years earlier (see page 94 above).

The defeat of the 'Arabist' forces in the State Department had, most especially after the disclosure of Ambassador Glaspie's memorandum of conversation, been close to absolute. Little ground was recovered by Glaspie's sudden mid-March appearance before Congress, in which she continued to be mysterious and misleading about her contacts with Saddam Hussein, and during which the Democratic leadership was careful to risk only the most anodyne and limited questioning. Political influence in Washington was back in the hands of those who, like Henry Kissinger and the Iran-contra circle, had long argued for a triad of allies—Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Israeli Right, with Turkey bringing up the rear. All three registered immediate gains from the war: Iran in the manner described above and by the destruction of the infrastructure of its most immediate rival; Saudi Arabia for no less apparent reasons; and the Shamir forces in Israel by the large tactical advantage they gained over the Palestinians. (This advantage was exploited rather ominously by the accession to Shamir's cabinet of the leader of the Molodet, or Fatherland, party which openly calls for the physical expulsion of the Palestinian Arabs from the occupied territories.) The Turks were cautious and opportunistic but, like the Israelis, were able to parlay their ambivalent 'restraint' over Kurdistan into immediate gains in terms of American aid and 'understanding'.

Other contradictions in the grand imperial strategy are likely to become more evident with time. It may suit the Iranian leadership to have a Shia-dominated protectorate in southern Iraq, but it will not be to the taste of the orthodox Sunni leadership in Riyadh to have such a volatile entity so close to their own borders. Other members of the Arab League, while they do not mourn the reduction of Saddam, do not favour the Balkanization or Lebanization of the region, while the Shamir-Sharon faction clearly does favour such an outcome. Thus, even within and among the three closest allies of Washington and the three most signal beneficiaries, there are conflicts of interest and objective which will require further work on the divide-and-rule front. The emplacement of permanent and visible American bases on

the Arabian peninsula may or may not make this strategy easier to pursue.

Those who felt that Saddam Hussein had, whatever his abnormalities and excesses, become the temporary possessor of the Nasserist mantle have been dealt a blow from which they cannot soon recover. This, if it was Nasser at all, was the Nasser who wasted himself in a stupid and brutal expedition to Yemen and who later, when confronted by Dayan, broadcast idiotic claims of victory on Cairo radio. (Even then, Nasser had the grace to offer his resignation.) In the next round of adjusted alliances in the region, the Palestinian cause and the radical and sometimes secular forces aligned with it will have to labour under a long-lasting handicap. While those whose manipulations actually led to the crisis and the war will feel able to pursue them less apologetically. (The second strand of my original article, the declension of American politics into a spectator and consumer business, has of course become more rather than less relevant in the meanwhile. By the time Bush could admit that he had deceived Congress and the press throughout, he was in a position so unassailable as almost to be praised for his candour in making the admission.)

The American writ now runs. With no serious rivals or enemies in prospect, it will be easy to see how, or if, old habits persist.

March 1991

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## *Khomeini: Fundamentalist or Populist?*

'How did Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini become an Imam?  
Much like the Holy Prophet Abraham. He carried out  
God's Will, smashed idols, was willing to sacrifice his own  
son, rose up against tyrants, and led the *mastazafin*  
[oppressed] against their *mastakberin* [oppressors].'

Iranian Parliamentary Deputy, Kayhan-e Hava'i, 21 June 1989

The slippery term 'fundamentalist' has been thrown at Khomeini so often, from so many different directions, that it has stuck.\* For conservatives, the label evokes xenophobia, militancy and radicalism. For liberals, it means extremism, fanaticism and traditionalism. For radicals, it conjures up the image of theological obscurantism, political atavism, and the rejection of science, history, modernity, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. For Orientalists—who still dominate Middle East studies—it reinforces their underlying presumption that the Muslim world is intrinsically unchanging, irrational, backward-looking, and incapable of freeing itself from its early history. The term has been used so often in the West that Khomeini's disciples in Iran, finding no Persian or Arabic equivalent, but flattered by its implications, have coined a new word, *bonyadgarayan*, by translating literally into Persian the English word fundamental-ist. This is ironic considering that the same disciples relish denouncing their opponents as *eliegari* (eclectic) and *gharbzadeh* (contaminated with Western diseases).

## 'Fundamentalism': A Persistent Misnomer

Even though the word 'fundamentalist' has gained wide currency, I would like to argue that the transference of a term invented by Protestants in early twentieth-century America to a political movement in the contemporary Middle East is not only confusing and misleading, but also downright wrong. It is so for a number of reasons.

First, if fundamentalism means the conviction that one's scriptural text is free of human errors, then all Muslim believers would have to be considered fundamentalists; for, after all, it is an essential article of Islam that the entire Koran is the absolute Word of God.

Second, if the term implies that the believer can grasp the true meaning of the religion by going directly to the essential text, bypassing the clergy (*ulama*), then Khomeini was by no means a fundamentalist. As a senior member of the Usuli School of Shiism, he opposed the Akhbari dissenters of the previous centuries who had argued that believers could understand Islam by relying mainly on the Koran. Khomeini, on the contrary, insisted that the Koran was too complex for the vast majority, and that even the Archangel Gabriel, who had brought the Koran to Mohammed, had not been able to understand the 'inner meanings' of what he conveyed. Khomeini frequently argued that these 'inner layers' could only be grasped by those who were familiar with Arabic, knew the teachings of the Twelve Shia Imams, had studied the works of the clerical scholars throughout the centuries, and, most nebulous of all, had somehow been endowed with *irfan* (gnostic knowledge).<sup>1</sup> Only the most learned clerics—and then only a few selected ones among them—could comprehend the inner essence of Islam.

Third, if fundamentalism means striving to re-create a Golden Age, then again Khomeini was not a straightforward fundamentalist. It is true that in his earlier years he implied that Mohammed's Mecca and Imam Ali's Caliphate were the models to replicate. But it is also true that in later years he often argued that even the Prophet and the First Imam had not been able to surmount the horrendous problems of their contemporary societies.<sup>2</sup> What is more, in the euphoria of revolutionary success, he boasted that the Islamic Republic of Iran had surpassed all previous Muslim societies, including that of the Prophet, in implementing true religion 'in all spheres of life, particularly in the material and the spiritual spheres'.<sup>3</sup> In short, the Islamic

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\* A shorter version of this article was first presented at a Conference on Comparative Religious Fundamentalism held in City College, City University of New York, in May 1988.

<sup>1</sup> R. Khomeini, *Kashf al-Asrar* (Secrets Unveiled), n.p., Teheran 1943, p. 322. See also R. Khomeini, Speech, *Jamhuri-yi Islami*, 22–31 December 1979; *Ettela'at*, 18 November 1987; *Ettela'at*, 25 August 1986; *Karban-e Hava'i*, 18 November 1987. For his most overtly mystical writings, see R. Khomeini, Letter to Faramarz Tabataba'i, *Karban-e Hava'i*, 23–30 May 1990. For a brief analysis of the influence of mysticism on Khomeini, see N. Pakdaman, 'Until Death', *Chestermander*, no. 6, Summer 1989, pp. 1–13.

<sup>2</sup> R. Khomeini, Speech, *Ettela'at*, 28 December 1979; *Karban-e Hava'i*, 9 May 1984.

<sup>3</sup> R. Khomeini, Speech, *Iran Times*, 4 December 1982.

Republic of Iran had supplanted Mohammed's Mecca and Imam Ali's Caliphate as the Muslim Golden Age. To some this smacks of blasphemy.

Fourth, if fundamentalism implies the rejection of the modern nation-state and with it the contemporary state boundaries, then Khomeini does not qualify, as Sami Zubaida has shown.<sup>4</sup> True, he at times claimed that imperialism had divided the Islamic Community (*Ummat*) into rival states and nations. It is also true that his early writings implicitly accept the existence of the territorial nation-state; and his later writings make this assumption more explicit. He increasingly spoke of *Mabane-e Iran* (Iranian Fatherland), *Mellat-e Iran* (Iranian Nation), *Irاندوست* (Iranian Patriot), and *Mardom-e Shari'at-e Iran* (Honourable People of Iran). He even disqualified one of his staunch supporters from entering the 1980 presidential elections on the grounds that his father had been born in Afghanistan. The nationalistic language, together with the use of exclusively Shia symbols and imagery, helps explain why the Khomeinists have failed to export the revolution outside Iran.

Fifth, if fundamentalism suggests the strict implementation of the laws, as well as the institutions, found in the basic texts, then Khomeini yet again was no fundamentalist. Many of Khomeini's most rigid laws, including those concerning the veil, are found not in the Koran but in later traditions—some of them with non-Muslim antecedents. Similarly, the whole constitutional structure of the Islamic Republic was modelled less on the early Caliphate than on De Gaulle's Fifth Republic. When parliamentary deputies began to question the Islamic precedents of some tax laws, Hojjat al-Islam Rafsanjani, one of Khomeini's closest disciples, retorted in exasperation: 'Where in Islamic history do you find Parliament, President, Prime Minister, and Cabinet of Ministers. In fact, eighty per cent of what we now do has no precedent in Islamic history.'<sup>5</sup> Khomeini's break with tradition is glaringly obvious in the realm closest to his own heart—that of Islamic law. Before the revolution, he categorically insisted that the *shari'a* (sacred law) could be implemented only if the religious judges (*fuqaha*) were entirely free of all state intervention, especially of the cumbersome judicial-review process.<sup>6</sup> After the revolution, he found it expedient to retain a large centrally controlled judicial structure, including an elaborate review process, in order both to provide some semblance of uniformity and to retain some control over local judges.<sup>7</sup>

Sixth, if fundamentalism means a dogmatic adherence to tradition and rejection of modern society, then Khomeini does not qualify. He frequently stressed that Muslims needed to import such essentials as technology, industrial plants and modern civilization (*tamaddon-e jadid*). His closest disciples often mocked the 'traditionalists' (*sunnati*)

<sup>4</sup> S. Zubaida, *Islam, the People, and the State*, London 1989, pp. 1–37.

<sup>5</sup> Cited by S. Bakhash, 'Islam and Social Justice in Iran', in M. Kramer, ed., *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, Colorado 1987, p. 113.

<sup>6</sup> R. Khomeini, *Valayat-e Faqih: Hokumat-e Islami* (The Jurist's Guardianship Islamic Government), n.p., Teheran, 1978, pp. 13–14.

<sup>7</sup> H. Rafsanjani, Speech, *Karban-e Hava'i*, 20 December 1987.

for being 'old-fashioned' (*kabani*). They accused them of obsession with ritual purity; preventing their daughters from going to school; insisting that young girls should always be veiled, even when no men were present; denouncing such intellectual pursuits as art, music and chess-playing; and, worst of all, refusing to take advantage of newspapers, electricity, cars, telephones, radios, planes and televisions.<sup>8</sup> In the words of Hojjat al-Islam Hojjati-Kermani, another Khomeini disciple: 'These traditionalists should be labelled reactionary (*ertejeyi*), for they want us to return to the age of the donkey. What we need is not the worship of the past, but a genuine *renassans* [literal transliteration of the word 'Renaissance']'.<sup>9</sup> The concepts, not to mention the terminology, make mockery of the claim that Khomeinism is merely another recurrence of the old traditionalist 'epidemic' that has plagued Islam from its very early days.<sup>10</sup>

Seventh, the term 'fundamentalism', because of its origins in early-twentieth-century American Protestantism, has distinct conservative political connotations. American fundamentalists, reacting against their contemporary 'social gospel' preachers, argued that the goal of true religion was not to change society but to 'save souls' by preserving the literal interpretation of the Bible—especially on such doctrinal issues as Darwinism, Judgement Day, and the Virgin Birth. Khomeinism, on the other hand, while by no means oblivious to doctrinal matters, is primarily concerned with sociopolitical issues—with revolution against the royalist elite, expulsion of Western imperialists, and mobilization of what it terms the *mastazafin* (oppressed) against the *mastakberin* (oppressors). In fact, Khomeini succeeded in gaining power mainly because his public pronouncements carefully avoided esoteric doctrinal issues. Instead, they hammered away at the regime on its most visible political, social and economic shortcomings.

Finally, the term 'fundamentalist' conjures up the image of inflexible orthodoxy, traditional authenticity, and rejection of intellectual innovations, especially foreign ones. Khomeini, however, despite his own denials, was in the political arena highly flexible, remarkably innovative, and equally cavalier towards hallowed traditions. He is important precisely because he discarded many Shia concepts. He borrowed words and slogans, as well as ideas, from the non-Muslim world. And, in doing so, he formulated a brand new Shia interpretation of state and society. The final product has less in common with conventional fundamentalism than with Third World populism, especially in Latin America. Of course, Khomeinism—unlike many other populisms—also contains a religious dimension. But this is not so much because it is a fundamentalist movement as because Shia Islam is part and parcel of the popular culture of Iran—especially of the bazaar middle class.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> M. Hojjati-Kermani, 'The Jurisprudent and Modern Civilization', *Ettela'at*, 4 November–5 December 1988.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> S. Arjomand, 'Traditionalism in Twentieth-century Iran,' in S. Arjomand, ed., *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, Albany 1984, pp. 195–232.

<sup>11</sup> For links between the bazaars and Shiism, see R. Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*, New York 1985, p. 345.

## The Meaning of Populism

The term 'populism' needs some elaboration. By it I mean a predominantly middle-class movement that mobilizes the lower classes, especially the urban poor, with radical rhetoric against imperialism, foreign capitalism and the political establishment. In mobilizing the 'common man', populist movements use charismatic figures as well as symbols, imagery and language that have potent value in their popular culture. They promise to raise drastically the standard of living and make their country fully independent of the West. Even more important, in attacking the status quo with radical rhetoric, they intentionally stop short of threatening the petty bourgeoisie and the whole principle of private property. Thus populist movements inevitably emphasize the importance not of economic-social revolution, but of cultural, national and political reconstruction.

This definition applies best to mass movements in Latin America, especially those led by Peron in Argentina and Vargas in Brazil. It excludes, however, three types of movement that have often been mislabelled as populist: the Russian Narodniks; the European Fascists, particularly in Germany and Italy; and the African struggles for national independence. It excludes the Narodniks for the simple reason that they were revolutionary socialists who had no respect for private property, and sought nothing less than the root-and-branch destruction of the existing class structure. It excludes the Fascists, even though they had much in common with populism, for the less simple reason that they enjoyed some upper-class support (from army officers, large landowners, bankers and industrialists). Moreover, they aimed to depoliticize rather than actively mobilize the lower classes. Fascism pushed the masses out of politics; populism invites, even incites, them in. The definition also excludes most nationalist movements in Africa on the grounds that they targeted their attacks on the external powers, not on the native elites, and mobilized their publics not through mass politics but through traditionally based clientalist networks.<sup>12</sup>

In defining Khomeini as a populist rather than a fundamentalist I do not wish to deny the sincerity of his religious convictions, nor the added authority that accrued to him as a clerical leader. To this extent we should recognize Khomeinism as a specifically religious variant of populism, in contrast to the more purely secular appeal of Peron, Vargas or even Saddam Hussein—despite the latter's new-found piety. But this does not mean that Khomeini should be seen mainly as a religious figure; nor does it justify any underestimation of the

<sup>12</sup> For discussions of the term 'political populism', see: N. Mouzelis, 'On the Concept of Populism', *Politics and Society*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1985, pp. 329–48; G. Ionescu and E. Gellner, eds., *Populism*, London 1969; A. Hennessy, 'Fascism and Populism in Latin America', in W. Laqueur, ed., *Fascism: A Reader's Guide*, Los Angeles 1978, pp. 255–96; M. Canovan, *Populism*, London 1981; E. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, London 1977; M. Conniff, ed., *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective*, Albuquerque 1982; G. Germani, *Authoritarianism, Fascism, and National Populism*, New Brunswick 1978; and T. Di Tella, 'Populism and Reform in Latin America', in C. Veliz, *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, New York 1965, pp. 47–73.



powerful secular themes he articulated. Such diverse figures as Savonarola, Gandhi, and the Puritans in the English Revolution possessed spiritual convictions and religious authority yet undeniably advanced secular causes, and their impact is invariably assessed more in secular than in religious terms. Khomeini's populism, while embedded in Shiism, is significant precisely because it managed drastically to reinterpret the basic political tenets of Shiism—especially in its attitudes towards state and society.

### Shia Theories of the State

Throughout the Middle Ages the Shia *ulama*, unlike their Sunni counterpart, failed to develop a consistent theory of the state. The Sunnis, recognizing the Umayyid and Abbasid Caliphs as the Prophet's legitimate successors, accepted the reigning monarchs as lawful as long as these rulers did not blatantly violate Islamic norms. Had not the Prophet himself said: 'My Community will never agree on an error'? Had not the Koran commanded: 'Obey God, His Prophet, and those among you who have authority'? Had not al-Ghazzali, the prominent mediaeval philosopher, argued that rulers were appointed by God, that rebellion against them was tantamount to rejection of the Almighty, and that forty years of tyranny were better than one single day of anarchy? Following these leads, the Sunni clergy associated political obedience with religious duty, and civil disobedience with religious heresy.

The Shia *ulama*, however, were ambivalent and divided. They rejected the early dynasties, arguing that the Prophet's true heirs should have been the Twelve Imams. This line began with Ali, the Prophet's first cousin, adopted son, son-in-law, and, according to them, designated successor as the *Imam* (Leader) of the Muslim Community (*Ummat*). It went through Ali's son Hosayn, the Third Imam, who had rebelled against the Yazid, the usurper Caliph, and had been martyred at the battle of Karbala forty-eight years after the Prophet's death. It ended with the last of their direct male descendants, the Twelfth Imam, also known as the *Mabdi* (Messiah), the *Imam-e Montazer* (Expected Leader), and the *Sabab-e Zaman* (Lord of the Age). He had supposedly gone into hiding a century after Hosayn's martyrdom, but would appear at some future time when the world was rampant with corruption and oppression to prepare the way for Judgement Day.

Although the Shia *ulama* agreed that only the Hidden Imam had full legitimacy, they differed sharply among themselves regarding the existing states—even the Shia ones. Some argued that since all rulers were in essence usurpers, true believers should shun the authorities like the plague. They should decline government office; avoid Friday prayers, where thanks were invariably offered to the monarch; take disputes to their own legal experts rather than to the state judges; practice *taqiyya* (dissimulation) when in danger; and pay *khoms*, the main legitimate tax, not to the government but to their clerical leaders, as their *Nayeb-e Imam* (Imam's Deputy).

Others, however, argued that one should grudgingly accept the state.

They claimed that bad government was better than no government; that many Imams had categorically opposed armed insurrections; and that Imam Ali, in his often quoted *Nabj al-Balaqbab* (Way of Eloquence), had warned of the dangers of social chaos. They also pointed out that Jafar Sadeq, the Sixth and most scholarly of the Imams, had stressed 'if your ruler is bad, ask God to reform him, but if he is good, ask God to prolong his life'.

Yet others wholeheartedly accepted the state—especially after 1501 when the Safavids established a Shia dynasty in Iran. Following the example of Majlisi, the well-known Safavid theologian, they argued that shahs were Shadows of God on Earth; that obedience was their divine right; that political dissension led directly to eternal damnation; that without monarchy there would inevitably be social anarchy; that kings and clerics were complementary pillars of the state and both shared the Imam's mantle. In making such arguments, these clerics often quoted not only al-Ghazzali, but also the famous Koranic commandment 'obey those among you who have authority'. In this form the Shia concept of the state came to be the mirror image of that of the conservative Sunnis.

It is significant that in all these discussions, which lasted, on and off, for some eleven centuries, no Shia writer even explicitly contended that monarchies per se were illegitimate or that the senior *ulama* had the authority to control the state.<sup>13</sup> Most viewed the clergy's main responsibilities, which they referred to as the *velayat-e faqih*, as being predominantly apolitical. The *ulama* were to study the law (*fiqh*) based on the Koran, the Prophet's Traditions (*Hadiths*), and the teachings of the Twelve Imams. They were also to use reason to update these laws; issue pronouncements (*fatwa*) on new concerns; adjudicate in legal disputes; and distribute the *khums* contributions to worthy widows, orphans, seminary students, and indigent *sayyids* (presumed male descendants of the Prophet). In fact, for most the term *velayat-e faqih* meant no more than the legal guardianship of the senior clerics over those deemed incapable of looking after their own interests—minors, widows and the insane. For a few, it also meant that the senior clerics had the authority to enter the political fray, but only temporarily and if the ruler was clearly endangering the whole community. In 1891 Mohammad Hasan Shirazi, one of the first to be generally recognized as the paramount senior cleric of his time—the *marja's taqlid* (source of emulation)—issued a *fatwa* against the government for selling a major tobacco concession to a British entrepreneur. But, in doing so, he stressed that he was merely opposed to bad court advisers and that he would withdraw from politics once the hated agreement was cancelled. Similarly in 1906 when the leading clerics—who now used the new title *ayatollah* (God's symbol)—participated in the constitutional revolution, their aim was neither to

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<sup>13</sup> One early nineteenth-century cleric, Ahmad Naraq, made implicit claims that the clergy had authority over the shahs. But he did not define this authority, nor did he make explicit political claims. See H. Dabashi, 'Early Propagation of Wilayat-i Faqih', in H. Naar, H. Dabashi and V. Naar, eds, *Expectations of the Millennium*, Albany 1989, pp. 288–300.

overthrow the monarchy nor to establish a theocracy, but at most to set up a supervisory committee of senior clerics to ensure that legislation passed by the elected parliament conformed to the *shari'a*.

### Khomeini's New Concept of the State

Khomeini began his political career with typical Shia ambiguities. His first political tract, written in 1943 and entitled *Kashf al-Asrar*, denounced the recently deposed Reza Shah for a host of secular sins—for closing down seminaries, expropriating religious endowments, propagating anti-clerical sentiments, replacing *shari'a* courts with state ones, permitting the consumption of alcoholic beverages and the playing of 'sensuous music', forcing men to wear Western-style hats, establishing coeducational schools, and banning the long veil (*chador*) thus 'forcing women to go naked into the streets'.<sup>14</sup> But he explicitly disavowed wanting to overthrow the throne and repeatedly reaffirmed his allegiance to monarchies in general and to 'good monarchs' in particular. He argued that the Shia clergy had never opposed the state as such, even when governments had issued anti-Islamic orders, for a 'bad order was better than no order at all'.<sup>15</sup> He emphasized that no cleric had ever claimed the right to rule; that many, including Majlisi, had supported their rulers, participated in government, and encouraged the faithful to pay taxes and cooperate with state authorities. If, on rare occasions, they had criticized their rulers, it was because they opposed specific monarchs, not the 'whole foundations of monarchy'. He also reminded his readers that Imam Ali had accepted 'even the worst of the early Caliphs'.<sup>16</sup>

The most Khomeini asked in *Kashf al-Asrar* was that the monarch should respect the clergy, recruit more of them into parliament, and ensure that state laws conformed to the *shari'a*. The *shari'a*, he argued, had prescriptions to remedy all social ills; and the *ulama*, particularly the *fuqaha* (religious jurists), being specialists on the *shari'a*, were like highly trained doctors who knew how to cure these social maladies.<sup>17</sup>

Khomeini retained these traditional attitudes towards the state throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Even during the bloody 1963 Uprising when he emerged as the most vocal cleric opposed to Mohammed Reza Shah, he called neither for a revolution nor for overthrow of the monarchy. Rather he castigated the Shah for secular and anti-national transgressions: for becoming an unwitting tool of the 'imperialist-Jewish conspiracy'; permitting women to vote in local elections; allowing citizens to take oaths on 'any sacred book'; smearing clerics as 'black reactionaries'; trampling over the constitutional laws; supposedly giving high offices to Bahais; siding with Israel against the Arabs, thus causing 'our Sunni brothers to think that we Shias are really Jews'; and 'capitulating' to the almighty dollar by

<sup>14</sup> Khomeini, *Kashf al-Asrar*, pp. 1-66.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 185-8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

exempting American military personnel from Iranian laws.<sup>18</sup> 'An American cook,' he argued, 'can now assassinate one of our religious leaders or run over the Shah without having to worry about our laws.'

These castigations were made more in the manner of a warning than of a revolutionary threat. Khomeini again reminded his audience that Imam Ali had accepted the Caliphs.<sup>19</sup> He expressed 'deep sorrow' that the Shah continued to mistreat the *ulama*, whom he described as the 'true guardians of Islam'.<sup>20</sup> He stressed that he wanted the young Shah to reform so that he would not go the same way as his father, namely into exile.<sup>21</sup> And even in 1965, after his own deportation, he continued to accept monarchies as legitimate. In one of his few proclamations issued in the mid 1960s, he exhorted Muslim monarchs to work together with Muslim republics against Israel.<sup>22</sup>

Khomeini did not develop a new Shia concept of state or society until very late into the 1960s. It is not clear what intellectual influences brought about this change. Khomeini himself was reluctant to admit formulating new notions. He was not in the habit of footnoting his works and giving credit where credit was due—especially if the sources were foreign ones. What is more, in the crucial years of 1965–70 when he was developing these new ideas, he was conspicuously silent, rarely giving interviews, sermons and pronouncements.

We can therefore only speculate as to the origins of the new ideas. These may have come from Shia theologians in Iraq, where he lived after 1964; these theologians had been deeply influenced by the local Communist Party, which for years had had strong roots among Iraqi Shias. Or they may have originated from Khomeini's younger Iranian students, more and more of whom now came from the lower middle class. Or again they may have come from the Iranian intelligentsia, especially the Mojahedin, the Confederation of Iranian Students in Exile, and the radical Muslim pamphleteer Ali Shariati. This radical intelligentsia had been influenced by contemporary Marxism, especially Castroism and Maoism.

If what caused Khomeini to change his views is debatable, the actual changes are not. He broke his long silence in early 1970 by giving a series of lectures attacking, without naming them, senior clerics who, he claimed, used the seminaries as a refuge from political realities. These lectures, originally given in Arabic, were soon published in Persian under the title of *Velayat-e Faqih: Hokumat-e Islami* (The Jurist's Guardianship: Islamic Government). In these lectures, Khomeini declared in no uncertain terms that Islam was inherently incompatible with all forms of monarchy (*saltanat*). He argued that monarchies

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<sup>18</sup> For Khomeini's speeches and proclamations in these years, especially 1962–64, see H. Ruhani, *Nahzat-e Imam Khomeini* (Imam Khomeini's Movement), Volume 1, Teheran 1984, pp. 142–735, Front for the Liberation of the Iranian People (FALIPA), *Khomeini va Jomhuri* (Khomeini and the Movement), n.p., 1973, pp. 1–35.

<sup>19</sup> Ruhani, Volume 1, p. 195.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 458.

<sup>22</sup> Ruhani, Volume 2, p. 159.

were 'pagan' institutions which the 'despotic' Ummayyids had taken over from the ancient Roman and Iranian Empires; that the old Prophets, particularly Moses, had opposed the Pharaohs because they judged such titles to be immoral; and that Imam Hosayn had raised the banner of revolt in Karbala because he had opposed hereditary kingship on principle. He also argued that monarchies were tantamount to *taqbat* (false gods), *shirk* (idolatry), and *fasad-e al-arr* (sowing corruption on earth). What is more, Khomeini continued, the Prophet Mohammed had declared *malik al-malak* to be the most hated of all titles in the eyes of the Almighty—Khomeini interpreted this title to be the same as 'Shah of Shahs'.

Muslims, Khomeini insisted, have the sacred duty to oppose monarchs. They must not collaborate with them, nor have recourse to their institutions, nor pay for their bureaucracies, nor practise dissimulation to protect themselves. On the contrary, they have the responsibility to rise up (*qiyam*) against them. Most kings, he added, have been crooks, oppressors and mass murderers. In later years, he went further to insist that all monarchs without exception—including Shah Abbas, the famous Safavid king, as well as Anushirvan, the ancient ruler whom Iranians usually refer to as 'the Just'—had been thoroughly unjust.<sup>23</sup>

In denouncing kingship, Khomeini put forward various reasons why the *ulama*, especially the *fuqaha*, had the divine right to rule.<sup>24</sup> He interpreted the Koranic commandment 'Obey those among you who have authority' to mean that Muslims had to follow their *fuqaha*. For the Prophet had handed down to the Imams all-encompassing authority—the right to lead and supervise the community as well as to interpret and implement the *shari'a*. And the Twelfth Imam, in going into hiding, had passed on this all-encompassing authority to the *fuqaha*. Had not Imam Ali ordered 'all believers to obey his successors'? Had he not explained that by 'successors' he meant 'those who transmit my statements and my traditions, and teach them to the people'? Had not the Seventh Imam praised the *fuqaha* as 'the fortress of Islam'? Had not the Twelfth Imam instructed the future generations to obey those who knew his teachings, since they were his representatives among the people in the same way as he was God's representative among all believers? Had not the Prophet himself declared that knowledge led to paradise and that 'men of knowledge' had as much superiority over ordinary mortals as the full moon had over the stars? Had not God created the *shari'a* to guide the community, the state to implement the *shari'a*, and the *fuqaha* to understand and implement the *shari'a*? The *fuqaha*, Khomeini concluded, have the 'same authority' as the Prophet and the Imams; and the term *velayat-e faqih* meant 'jurisdiction over believers', all of whom are in dire need of the *shari'a*. In other words, disobedience to the *fuqaha* was disobedience to God.<sup>25</sup>

In presenting his *Velayat-e Faqih*, Khomeini warned listeners that this

<sup>23</sup> R. Khomeini, Speech, *Ettelaat*, 2 December 1985.

<sup>24</sup> Khomeini, *Velayat-e Faqih*, pp. 76–127.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

'true Islam' might sound 'strange'.<sup>26</sup> After all, false ideas spread over the centuries by a conspiracy of Jews, imperialists and royalists had taken a heavy toll. Important *hadiths* had been misinterpreted. The word *faqih* had been left out of important quotations. What is more, government officials had systematically spread the notion that clerics should be seen within seminary confines and not heard in the arena of controversial politics. So much so that the crucial term *velayat-e faqih* had been distorted to refer only to the *ulama's* guardianship over widows, orphans and the mentally ill. Despite these shortcomings, Khomeini reminded his audience, clerics had risen to the occasion in times of crisis to protect Islam and Iran from imperialism and royal despotism—in the Tobacco Crisis of 1891, in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, in the dark days of Reza Shah, and, of course, in the 1963 Uprising against Mohammed Reza Shah. In these crises, Khomeini stressed, the *ulama* as a whole kept alive 'national consciousness' and stood firm as the 'fortress of independence' against imperialism, secularism, and other 'isms' imported from the West.<sup>27</sup>

### Khomeini's Transformed View of Society

Khomeini's attitudes towards society developed along parallel lines. In his pre-1970 writings, he tended to accept the traditional notions of society as sketched out in the *Nabj al-Balaqhab*, in the teachings of the Shia *ulama*, and in the 'Mirror of Princes' literature produced in the Safavid and Qajar courts. He accepted the conventional paternalistic presumptions that God had created both private property and society; that society should be formed of a hierarchy of mutually dependent strata (*qasbre*); that the poor should accept their lot and not envy the rich; and that the rich should thank God, avoid conspicuous consumption, and give generously to the poor. He often stressed that the *shari'a* protected wealth as a 'divine gift', and that the state had the sacred duty to keep a healthy balance between the various strata, preventing each from transgressing the others. It is significant that in these early writings he rarely used the word *tabaqeb* (class), and scrupulously avoided the term *enqelab* (revolution) even though he did occasionally call for a *qiyam* (uprising). For the conventional *ulama*, *enqelab* was a derogatory term connoting anarchy, class hatred, and the world turned upside down.

In his post-1970 writings, however, Khomeini depicted society as sharply divided into two warring classes (*tabaqat*): the *mostazafin* (oppressed) against the *mostakberin* (oppressors); the *fugara* (poor) against the *sarvatmandan* (rich); the *mellat-e mostazaf* (oppressed nation) against the *bokemat-e shaytan* (Satan's government); the *zaqbeh-neshinba* (shantytown dwellers) against the *kakh-neshinba* (palace dwellers); the *tabaqeb-e payin* (lower class) against the *tabaqeb-e بالا* (upper class); and the *tabaqeb-e mostamdan* (needy class) against the *tabaqeb-e a'yan* (aristocratic class).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 85

<sup>27</sup> R. Khomeini, speech, *Ettela'at*, 16 June 1981. See also *Ettela'at*, 10 January 1981; and *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, 1 March 1989

The key to this transformation can be seen in the way Khomeini used the word *mostazafin*. He rarely used it in his early writings. When he did it was in the Koranic sense of the 'humble' and passive 'meek' believers—especially orphans, widows and the mentally ill. But in the 1970s he used it in almost every single sermon, speech and proclamation. What is more, he used it to depict the angry poor, the 'exploited' people, and the 'downtrodden masses'. It should also be noted that after the revolution he gradually broadened the term to bring in not only the propertied middle class but even members of the wealthy elite who actively supported the new order. Thus by the mid 1980s, the term *mostazafin* became a broad subjective category bearing striking resemblance to the Jacobin *sans culottes*, Sukharno's *Maurbaen* (commonfolk), Peron's *descamisados* (coatless ones), and Vargas's *trabalhadores* (urban workers).

In his public pronouncements of the 1970s, Khomeini rarely mentioned doctrinal issues and the concept of *valayat-e faqih*. Instead he targeted the Shah on sensitive socioeconomic issues. He accused him of widening the gap between rich and poor; favouring cronies, relatives, senior officials, and other *kravatis* (tie wearers); wasting oil resources on the ever-expanding army and bureaucracy; setting up phoney assembly plants instead of real manufacturing industries; starving the countryside of essential services, including clinics, schools, electricity and public baths; failing to give land to the landless peasantry; condemning the working class to a life of poverty, misery and drudgery; creating huge shantytowns and neglecting low-income housing; bankrupting the bazaars by refusing to protect them from foreign competition and the super-rich entrepreneurs; and compounding social problems by failing to combat rising crime, alcoholism, prostitution and drug addiction.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, Khomeini continued to denounce the Shah for helping the USA and Israel against the Arab World, for trampling over political liberties, for making the country increasingly dependent on the West, and for using cultural imperialism to undermine Islam and Iran. Islam was endangered, Khomeini constantly warned, from outside by imperialism and Zionism, and from inside by 'fifth columnists' (*sohan-e panjom*)—monarchists, liberals, secularists and leftists.

In these denunciations, Khomeini resorted to populist rhetoric. This rhetoric, at first glance, sounds highly radical, but more careful scrutiny shows it to be extremely vague on specifics and silent on the question of private property. Many of Khomeini's catchphrases were adopted as demonstration slogans during and after the revolution. They included such dictums as:<sup>29</sup>

Islam belongs to the *mostazafin*, not to the *mostakberin*.

<sup>26</sup> For Khomeini's speeches on these issues, see Ruhani, Volume I; JAMA, *Khabarnamah*, 1972-79; and *Paryam-e Mojahed*, 1972-78.

<sup>29</sup> For the use of such slogans, see Anon., 'The Oppressors and the Oppressed', *Ettela'at*, 15 February-23 April 1983. See also Tudeh Party, *Hezb-e Tudeh-e Iran az Khat-e Imam Pashayi Mahanad* (The Tudeh Party of Iran Supports Imam Khomeini's Line), Teheran 1979, pp. 1-32.

Islam is for equality and social justice.  
 Islam represents the shantytown dwellers, not the palace dwellers.  
 Islam will eliminate class differences.  
 We are for Islam, not for capitalism and feudalism.  
 Islam originates from the masses, not from the rich.  
 In a truly Islamic society, there will be no shantytowns.  
 In a truly Islamic society, there will be no landless peasants.  
 The duty of the *ulama* is to liberate the hungry from the clutches of the rich.  
 Islam is not the opiate of the masses.  
 The poor were for the Prophet, the rich were against Him.  
 The poor die for the Islamic Revolution, the rich plotted against it.  
 The martyrs of the Islamic Revolution were all members of lower classes—peasants, industrial workers, and bazaar merchants and tradesmen.  
*Motaxaffin* of the world unite.  
 The *motaxaffin* of the world should create a Party of the *Motaxaffin*.  
 The problems of the East come from the West—especially from American imperialism.  
 Neither West nor East, but Islam.  
 The oppressed nations of the world should unite against their imperialist oppressors.

Some of Khomeini's most radical-sounding pronouncements came on May Days—an occasion celebrated by the Islamic Republic. In 1979 he declared that every day should be considered Workers' Day, as labour is the source of all things, even of heaven and hell.<sup>30</sup> In 1980 he described workers as the 'beacon of humanity', praised them as the 'most valuable class in society', and exhorted them to continue standing firm against imperialism.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in 1982 he announced that the 'sweat of the worker was as precious as the blood of the martyr' and that 'a day in the life of a worker was more valuable than the whole life of a capitalist exploiter.'<sup>32</sup>

Khomeini, moreover, reinterpreted early Islamic history to reinforce these populist notions. He argued that contrary to traditional hearsay the Prophet had been a humble shepherd, not a successful businessman; that Imam Ali had been a penniless water carrier, not a prosperous merchant; that many of the early prophets had been simple labourers who had looked forward to the day when the *motaxaffin* would become the *mostakberin* and the *mostakberin* would become the *motaxaffin*. He also argued that most of the Shia *ulama*, including the grand ayatollahs, had originated from the common people, lived like 'humble folk', and died with few worldly possessions.<sup>33</sup>

Khomeini's populist rhetoric reached a crescendo in 1979. As the old regime was collapsing, he incorporated into his political vocabulary two words he had hitherto scrupulously avoided—*enqelab* (revolution) and *jomburi* (republic). He now argued that the Islamic revolution

<sup>30</sup> R. Khomeini, May Day Speech, *Ettela'at*, 2 May 1979.

<sup>31</sup> R. Khomeini, May Day Speech, *Ettela'at*, 3 May 1980.

<sup>32</sup> R. Khomeini, May Day Speech, *Iran Times*, 2 May 1982.

<sup>33</sup> R. Khomeini, Speech, *Iran Times*, 27 May 1983.



would pave the way for an Islamic republic, which, in turn, would hasten the establishment of a truly Islamic society. This, being the exact opposite of Pahlavi Iran, would be free of want, hunger, unemployment, slums, inequality, illiteracy, crime, alcoholism, prostitution, drugs, nepotism, corruption, exploitation, foreign domination—and, yes, even of bureaucratic red tape. Instead it would be a genuinely independent community based on equality, fraternity and social justice.

In promising utopia, Khomeini managed to discard, nevertheless, two other important tenets of traditional Shiism. For centuries, Shias had looked back on Mohammed's Mecca and Imam Hosayn's Caliphate as the Golden Age of Islam. Khomeini now declared that revolutionary Iran had already surpassed these early societies and their insoluble problems. For centuries, Shias had believed that the Mahdi would return when the world was overflowing with injustice and tyranny. Khomeini now argued that He would reappear when Muslims had returned to Islam, created a just society, and exported their revolution to other countries.<sup>34</sup> The traditional quietist tenet had been turned inside out.

### The Islamic Republic's Constitution

Khomeini's populism can also be seen in the two most important texts published since the revolution: the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, and his own Last Will and Testament. The Constitution was drafted in 1979–80 by an Assembly of Religious Experts (*Majlis-e Khobragan*)—most of whom were Khomeini's disciples. The final testament was drawn up in 1983, revised in the mid 1980s, and published immediately after his death in 1989.

At first glance, the text of the Constitution with its one hundred and seventy-five clauses reads like a cumbersome 'fundamentalist' document.<sup>35</sup> It begins with the declaration that the Islamic Republic is based on the 'principal faiths' of the Justice of God; the existence of One God and Submission to His Will; the Divine Message and its fundamental role in all human laws; and the concept of the resurrection and its 'role in human evolution'. It also declares that the constitutional clauses for the leadership were to endure until the *Mahdi*, the Lord of the Age, reappeared on Earth. This, however, did not prevent the Assembly of Experts from drastically revamping these same clauses ten years later and even introducing a theological exam for entry to this exclusive club in order to weed out the more radical clerics.

A closer look, however, shows that the text of the Constitution, not to mention its pretext, subtext and context, is highly non-fundamentalist. Its central structure was taken straight from the French Fifth Republic, founded on Montesquieu's separation of powers. It divided the

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<sup>34</sup> R. Khomeini, Speech, *Ettela'at*, 13 April 1988, *Iran Times*, 27 March 1982.

<sup>35</sup> For the complete text of the Constitution, see *Iran Times*, 30 November 1979. For later revisions, see *Kayhan-e Hava'i*, 19 June 1989.

state into the Executive, headed by the President supervizing a highly centralized state; the Judiciary, with powers to appoint district judges and review their verdicts; and the national Parliament, elected through universal adult suffrage. For years Khomeini had argued that women's suffrage was anti-Islamic. He now argued that to deprive women of the vote was anti-Islamic.

Placed above this conventional Constitution was Khomeini's new concept of *Velayat-e Faqib*. Khomeini, described as the Supreme Religious Jurist, was given the authority to dismiss the President, appoint the main military commanders, declare war and peace, and name senior clerics to a Guardian Council whose chief responsibility was to ensure that all laws passed by parliament conformed to the *shari'a*. The Constitution added that if after Khomeini no supreme *faqib* emerged, then the leadership would pass to a committee of three or five senior clerics (*marja'-e taqlid*) elected by the Assembly of Experts.

In fact, after Khomeini's death no such *faqib* emerged. And the Assembly of Experts, well aware that the senior jurists distrusted their populism, quickly amended the Constitution, dropping the requirement of *marja'-e taqlid*, so that Khomeini's position could be inherited by Hojjat al-Islam Khamanehi. Khamanehi was neither a *faqib*, nor a *marja'-e taqlid*, nor at the time even a generally accepted ayatollah. This amendment, while revealing the pragmatic nature of Khomeinism, unwittingly undermined the theological foundations of Khomeini's *Velayat-e Faqib*. For, after all, Khomeini had argued that the most senior religious jurists—not just any cleric—were endowed with the right to rule precisely because they had the scholastic expertise on the *shari'a* that God had created to regulate society.

The Constitution also contained much populist rhetoric. It began with the two controversial terms *enqelab* (revolution) and *jomburi* (republic). It glorified Khomeini not only as the revolution's leader (*rabbat*), the republic's founder, and the most respected of the *faqib*, but also as an *Imam*—a title which Iranian Shias had traditionally reserved for the original Twelve Imams. In fact, conservative clerics viewed this use of the title as blasphemous.<sup>36</sup>

The Constitution went on to promise—'as a legal obligation'—to provide all citizens with pensions, social security, unemployment benefits, disability pay, medical services, and free secondary as well as primary-school education. It further promised to eradicate hoarding, usury, monopolies, unemployment, poverty and social deprivation; provide interest-free loans; utilize science and technology; and 'plan the economy in such a way that all individuals would have the time and opportunity to enhance their moral and social development, and participate in the leadership and management of the country.' These clauses seem to have escaped the notice of Western journalists who claim that the Iranian Revolution was carried out in the name of

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<sup>36</sup> For discussion of the controversial term *Imam*, see M. Fischer, 'Imam Khomeini. Four Levels of Understanding', in J. Esposito, ed., *Voces of Resurgent Islam*, New York 1983, p. 164; and S. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, New York 1988, p. 101.

rejecting the material things of this world.<sup>37</sup> The Constitution furthermore promised to make Iran totally independent—culturally, agriculturally and industrially; prevent the economic domination of the country by foreigners; cancel all economic concessions to them; strive for the total unity of all Muslims; and ‘help the *mazlūmīn* of the world struggle against their oppressors’.

Despite the radical rhetoric, the Constitution undertook to safeguard private property. It promised to balance the government budget, encourage ‘home ownership’, and respect the predominance of the ‘private sector’ in agriculture, trade, services, and small industries. What is more, it intentionally avoided the socialistic phrase *mezam-e towhidi* (unitary order), a term which the Mojahedin and other Islamic radicals—as opposed to populists—wanted enshrined into the republic’s Constitution. The limitations of this populism became more clear in 1989 when the new electoral law explicitly barred those without higher degrees from running for parliament. Apparently, only those with higher education were deemed qualified to represent the people.

### Khomeini’s Last Will and Testament

Khomeini’s 35-page handwritten will contains a coherent structure, even though it went through major alterations between the time it was written and eventually published.<sup>38</sup> Its prologue hails true Islam as the message of ‘liberation’ and ‘social justice’ not just for Iranians and Muslims but also for the ‘oppressed people of the world, irrespective of nationality and religion’. It also warns that the true message is being constantly distorted by an international conspiracy involving not only Zionists, Communists, Eastern and Western imperialists, but also by Marxists masquerading as Muslims, Western-contaminated liberals, opportunistic clerics, and local tyrants—namely the Saudis in Arabia, King Hassan of Morocco, King Hussein of Jordan, and Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

The actual text has sections addressed to specific groups. It addresses the *ulama* and the seminaries; the university-educated intelligentsia; the majles deputies; the judiciary; the executive, particularly the cabinet; the armed forces—the regular army as well as the revolutionary guards; the mass media—the radio-television network and the daily newspapers; the opposition in exile, especially the Marxist parties; and last but not least, the bazaars with their shopkeepers, traders and small businessmen. In each section, he warns of the ever-present danger of conspiracies hatched by the superpowers and ‘fifth columnists’.

In addressing the majles, Khomeini stresses that the deputies should continue to come from the ‘middle class and the deprived population’, and not from the ranks of the ‘capitalists, land-grabbers, and

<sup>37</sup> R. Wright, reviewing S. Arjomand’s *The Turban for the Crown*, claims that in the revolution people ‘rose to demand less freedom and fewer material things’ See the book-review section of the *New York Times*, 10 December 1989.

<sup>38</sup> A. Khomeini, *Mata-e Kamele-e Vassayeh-e Elahi va Siyas-e Imam Khomeini* (The Complete Text of Imam Khomeini’s Divine Will and Testament), *Kayhan-e Hava’i*, 14 June 1989.

the upper class who lust in pleasure and know nothing about hunger, poverty and barefootedness'. In addressing the ministers and civil servants, he reminds them that the revolution had succeeded because of the active participation of the 'deprived classes'. He also warns that if they lost this support they would follow the Pahlavis into exile. What is more, in addressing the bazaars, he emphasizes that Islam safeguards private property. It encourages private investment in agriculture and industry, provides for a 'balanced economy in which the private sector is recognized', and, unlike communism, recognizes the importance of private property in providing 'social justice' and turning the 'wheels of a healthy economy'. He ends his last testament by telling Muslims and the deprived of the world that they should not sit around passively waiting for liberation, but should rise up to overthrow the imperialists and their local lackies—the tyrants, the palace dwellers, and those indulging in conspicuous consumption.

### Khomeinism and Populism

Thus Khomeinism, despite its religious dimension, in some ways resembles populism in Latin America. This is not surprising since modern Iran and Latin America have much in common: economic rather than political dependency on the West; informal rather than formal subjection to imperialism; an upper class that included the comprador big bourgeoisie; an anti-imperialist middle class; an industrial working class unorganized by the Left; and a recent influx of rural migrants into the sprawling shantytowns. The results are in many ways similar. Khomeinism—like Latin American populism—is mainly a middle-class movement that mobilizes the masses with radical-sounding rhetoric against the external powers and entrenched classes. But in attacking the establishment, it is careful to respect private property and avoid concrete proposals that would undermine the petty bourgeoisie. These movements have vague aspirations, but no precise programmes. They use the language of class against the ruling elite, but once the old order is swept aside they stress the need for communal solidarity and national unity. They are more interested in changing 'cultural' and educational institutions than in overthrowing the modes of production and distribution. They are Janus-faced: revolutionary against the regimes, conservative once the new ones are set up. But it is this revolutionary face that accounts for the support they initially won from the Left—from social democrats and Castroists as well as from Trotskyists, Maoists and Stalinists. Religious fundamentalism would never have won such support.

Khomeinism—like these populisms—sees international 'plots' everywhere: among intellectuals, political non-conformists, and ethnic and religious minorities. Dissenters, even on the left, are treated as dangerous 'fifth columnists'. Khomeini has executed Marxists on the grounds that they are 'pro-American communists'. These populisms claim to be returning to 'native roots', eradicating 'cosmopolitan ideas', and charting a non-capitalist and non-communist Third Road towards development. In fact, however, many of their concepts and slogans are borrowed from the outside world—especially from European socialism. These populisms all use mass organizations and

plebiscitary politics to mobilize the masses, but at the same time distrust any form of political pluralism, liberalism and grass-roots democracy. All have ambiguous attitudes toward the state. On the one hand, they do not want the government to threaten middle-class property. On the other hand, they want to strengthen their government by extending its reach throughout society and providing social benefits to the urban poor. What is more, these populisms elevate the leader to a demi-god who not only stands way above the people but also embodies their historical roots, future destiny, and revolutionary martyrs. Despite all the talk of the people, power emanates down from the leader, not up from the masses. Despite these similarities, Khomeinism and Latin American populism do have differences. The former spoke predominantly through Shiism, the latter through secular nationalism. The religious origins and inflections of Khomeinism have, in conjunction with its radical secular themes, helped give it resonance in the Islamic world—especially among Shias. It may even be that the varieties of populism articulated within a religious language can appear more radical than the secular forms, since the former derive confidence from their deep rootedness in popular mentalities. It could also be said that the popular mobilizations inspired by Khomeinism were in political terms more 'revolutionary' than Peronist and Vargas movements which received their initial impetus when the leaders were already in power.

Since Khomeini's death, his heirs—Imam Khamenehi and President Rafsanjani—have continued denouncing imperialism, Zionism and 'exploitative capitalism' while, at the same time, protecting petty-bourgeois property and further toning down their radical rhetoric. They no longer talk of land reform, income redistribution and nationalization of foreign trade. They instead praise business as an 'honourable profession', wax eloquent about the religious virtues of the bazaar, criticize 'extremists' for their 'infantile ideas', and differentiate between Islam which sanctifies private property and communism which advocates the 'sharing of everything, including wives and homosexuals'. They have weeded out radicals from positions of power. They talk less about social justice and the rights of the shantytown poor, and more about productivity, privatization, business incentives, managerial skills and free-market mechanisms. Their answer to the horrendous unemployment problem is trickle-down economics worthy of the Chicago School. This 'pragmatism' extends to international affairs. The regime has wooed foreign capital and Western aid—particularly from the World Bank. It has normalized relations with Europe, including Britain, and with the Gulf states. It has probably encouraged Shia groups in Lebanon to release hostages. It has discouraged the independence movement in Soviet Azerbaijan. What is more, in the current crisis in Iraq, Iran—despite ties to Saddam Hussein's Shia opposition—appears to be motivated less by the ambition of exporting the revolution than by the fear that the Americans and the British, together with the Saudis and the Egyptians, might install a client regime in Baghdad. The Khomeinists, like other populists, have been able to discard radical rhetoric in favour of pragmatic politics without contradicting their vague ideology—but, of course, at the risk of undermining their wide popular support.

## Postmodernism, Subjectivity and the Question of Value

Within the circles influenced by and sympathetic to postmodernism there has of late been discussion as to how long an engagement with traditional criteria of truth and value can be deferred.<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested that the eclecticism and relativist logic of postmodernism is inherently self-stultifying—or at least incompatible with a defence of these modes of cognition as some form of political and cultural enlightenment. Hence their advocates are delivered into a condition of theoretical paralysis: they can neither argue for the 'truth' or knowledge status of the forms of argument they have employed to expose the mistakes and self-delusions of foundationalist metaphysics, nor lay claim to any emancipatory values in liberating a left politics from the disquieting assimilations of identity concealed within its collectivist and humanist 'grand narrative'.

This 'impasse', it should be said, does not necessarily afflict deconstructive strategies in themselves (except in the sense that it can always be asked of their practitioners what motivates them other than an impulse to get us to think aright about texts, or at any rate to perceive what the text itself is blind to). For to pursue the path of Derridean *différance* is, strictly speaking, to pre-empt the appeal to the 'identities' whose alleged occlusion by orthodox liberal or socialist discourse has been invoked in justification of the Anglo-American use of deconstructive methods.<sup>2</sup> Thus it might be argued that Derridean theory, in openly acknowledging its self-subverting quality (that it can rely only on what it theorizes as non-reliable), is neither self-

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<sup>1</sup> The recent ICA conference on 'Values' (December 1990) is a reflection of this more self-questioning postmodernist mood. Arguing that although liberating, and even democratizing, in its refusal of hierarchy, the postmodern condition was paralysing in its deconstruction of all 'principled positions', the conference stated its aims as 'to assess whether there is now a gradual shift away from these manifestations of postmodernity, towards a reassertion of value, and to look at the implications and effects of this shift across a spectrum of cultural, aesthetic and political fields'. This article is based on a talk given at that conference; it will be included in a collection of the conference papers to be edited by Judith Squires and published by Lawrence and Wishart.

<sup>2</sup> Though opinions differ as to how far Derrida himself escapes a 'philosophy of origins' or the prejudices of 'identity-thinking'. Thus Peter Dews has argued (*Legacies of Deconstruction*, London 1987, ch. 2) that Derrida is returned to this perspective in making *différance* the generative ground of identity, and that by allowing 'the fatal slide towards an account of difference as logically prior to and constitutive of identity,' he 'generates insoluble problems for his philosophy' (p. 42).

subverting nor non-self-subverting—though I think it must also be the condition of so arguing that it can lead itself neither to this politics, nor to that, neither to value commitments nor to their disowning.

Some of my argument in what follows does bear on the general question of the acceptability of the Derridean position/non-position, though in so far as it does I present this precisely as a question of 'which way to jump'; in other words, I present it as a problem of the mutually exclusive character of opposing modes of cognition and not as a problem of the internal consistency of either. But what I shall be mainly addressing here are certain issues concerning value and subjectivity that arise in virtue of the attempt to have it both ways—to have, as it were, a foot both in and out of deconstruction. They are issues that present themselves, and that have recently become, a focus of postmodernist self-criticism, as a result of the various ways in which postmodernist ideas have been yoked into the service of a left-wing politics or defended as emancipatory insights. (And these ideas, I should add, are by no means of exclusively Derridean origin, but often in fact owe more to theorists of whom Derrida has been critical, such as Foucault, or to the scepticism about progress and the ironic self-positionings recommended by thinkers like Jean-François Lyotard and Richard Rorty).<sup>3</sup>

One, rather shorthand, way of talking about these issues has been in terms of a postmodernist 'suppression' of values, and its refusal to employ an associated vocabulary (in aesthetics—of 'judgement', 'artistic worth', 'intrinsic merit', etc.; in ethics—of 'rights', 'freedom', 'duty', etc.; and in epistemology—of 'truth', 'verification', 'objectivity', etc). But in fact this is a somewhat misleading shorthand, since postmodernist argument has invited us not so much to suppress this vocabulary but to construe it as directing us to nothing beyond or outside its own discourse. According to this position, there are no transcendent, extra-discursive qualities or experiences to which we can appeal as the grounds for the talk of values and the discriminations it offers, since these refer us only to what discourse itself constructs. The dispute, in short, has to do with how far we retain or sever a discursive–non-discursive dialectic: how far the 'text' or 'discourse' of values is what it is in virtue of how the 'world' is; how far we read the world to be as it is only in virtue of the discourse or text. This means that if the symptoms of a return of the 'repressed' of value are now disturbing the psychic composure of certain postmodernist modes of reflection, then this is not to do with the repression of a vocabulary but rather with the repression or evasion of the realist commitments that may be essential to sustaining any consistent defence of broadly left-wing political values.

If this, then, is the controversy or point of tension at issue, it seems

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<sup>3</sup> Full bibliographies for these thinkers are readily available and would seem inappropriate in the context of a brief appraisal of this kind. I refer here particularly to the argument of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, Manchester 1986, and Rorty's *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge 1989. Derrida criticizes Foucault in 'Cogito and the History of Madness', *Writing and Difference*, London 1978. For a recent discussion of their respective positions (which argues, however, that they tend to agreement on questions of power and ethics), see R. Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: the Other Side of Reason*, London 1990.

appropriate to begin by saying something about where I stand in regard to it, and I shall do this—for strategic purposes that should become clearer as I proceed—by invoking a caricature of the dispute. The caricature presents us on the one side with the dogged metaphysicians, a fierce and burly crew, stalwartly defending various bedrocks and foundations by means of an assortment of trusty but clankingly mechanical concepts such as 'class', 'materialism', 'humanism', 'literary merit', 'transcendence' and so forth. Obsolete as these weapons are, they have the one distinct advantage that in all the dust thrown up by their being flailed around, their wielders do not realize how seldom they connect with their opponents. On the other side stands the opposition, the feline ironists and revellers in relativism, dancing lightheartedly upon the waters of *différance*, deflecting all foundationalist blows with an adroitly directed ludic laser beam. Masters of situationist strategy, they sidestep the heavy military engagement by refusing to do anything but play.

Now, if I were allowed only the mirror of this caricature in which to find a reflection of my own position, I would be feeling pretty schizoid, but I suppose in the end I would have to recognize something minimally less distorting of my own features in the grotesque metaphysical Cerberus than in the ironical Cheshire grin. In other words, if forced to align myself in terms of this caricature, I am ready to do so, provided that in exchange everything further I have to say be received as typical of the growlings of the monstrous metaphysicians.

### The Postmodern Condition

First, then, a few growlings about the equivocal feelings that our postmodern times can induce—an equivocation which at its most extreme could be compared to that of the third-century Chinese poet, Chuang Chou, who tells us that one night he dreamt he was a butterfly, but on awakening did not know whether he had dreamt he was a butterfly or whether he was not now a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou. For at times it can seem as if we stand at the interface of two incommensurable modes of thinking, each of which, we know, should we yield to it, has the capacity to constitute itself as reality and the other as its dream or myth. Each, in other words, seems possessed of such a drug-like power to reorchestrate our mental outlook that we hesitate to lend ourselves as guinea pigs to either of its thought experiments.

At one level—that at which we are called upon to decide our general affective response to the 'postmodern' condition—we can think of this equivocation in terms of the emotional tug between two contrary invitations. One, that which asks us to keep a grip on the horror and ugliness of our world, never to forget the extent to which it is beset by war, famine, torture, loss of nature, grotesque inequalities and intolerable oppressions; and which therefore calls upon us to analyse all practice and historical process in terms of the degree to which it promotes or detracts from the realization of greater peace, equality, democracy, ecological well-being and the future flourishing of our species and its planet. The other is the invitation to view history as littered with the victims of such well-intentioned visions and utopian projects, and in the light of that to give ourselves over to a pragmatic



acceptance of the loss of values—an acceptance, moreover, that we might as well feel as cheerful about as we can. For if utopias are never to be realized, is there any more harm to be done in accepting their loss than in lamenting it? This, then, is the invitation to respond to dystopia by a consciously decadent pleasuring in its awfulness. It is, as Elizabeth Wilson has suggested, to convert 'left-wing' anxiety into a solution: to live in a film-noir world.<sup>4</sup>

Now it is debateable how far the flight into cinema and the film-noir option has exerted any very real attraction even among the more committed adherents of postmodernist anti-progressivism. But if some have sensed the temptation of decadence, but yet hesitated to succumb to it, they will be aware, I think, that any ambivalence in this area is such as to draw them back into the camp of the metaphysicians. If they hesitate, I suggest it is because they know the allure of a pragmatic dystopianism to be a fantasy in which it is much easier to cocoon oneself if one is already enjoying comforts which figure only in the utopian dreams of the African peasant, the street child in Rio de Janeiro or the Iraqi political prisoner. They know, in other words, that revelling in the loss of progress is a Western metropolitan privilege which depends on living in a certain state of grace, a condition where no-one is starving you, no-one torturing you, no-one even denying you the price of a cinema ticket or tube fare to the conference on postmodernism.

My first point, then, is this. We should accept the implication of any misgiving felt about yielding to postmodernist cynicism: namely, that it reveals a certain sensitivity about the self-indulgent quality of that reaction; an awareness of how parochial it is to present the loss of hope or progress as a universally available mode of adjustment to the ugliness of our times. But to recognize this is in effect to be forced out of equivocation back toward an open commitment to certain political principles and values. It is to recognize certain objective structures of oppression by reference to which we discriminate between practices, dispute the wisdom of various emancipatory strategies, and, indeed, engage in more than theory.

But to come back now to the theoretical opposition whose caricature I sketched in my opening remarks, where a similar point holds. On the one hand, we have grounded theory, a cognitive position that remains committed to truth and objectivity as the condition of making sense of value preference. On the other hand, we have deconstruction and difference theory, a perspective from which all appeals to intrinsic quality as the ground of aesthetic and cultural judgement, or to objectively verifiable needs and sufferings as the justification of political and ethical commitments, must be rejected as so many forms of logocentrism—as resting their claims on appeals to concepts of truth and value which are radically indecidable, unstable metaphors always intruding between the presence or state of affairs they supposedly grasp. Here too there is extensive equivocation, and precisely because one can appreciate the measure of virtue in both approaches. But again, I would want to argue that the very reasoning that allows

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<sup>4</sup> In a recent talk given to a conference on 'Feminism and Postmodernism' at the University of Kent.

us to appreciate the attractions and importance of discourse theory and deconstruction is such as to commit the reasoner to defending certain values.

Why, for example, lend ourselves to the politics of 'difference' if not in virtue of its enlightenment—what it permits in the way of releasing subjects from the conflation of imperializing discourse and the constructed identities of binary oppositions? Why lend ourselves to the deconstruction of liberal-humanist rhetoric if not to expose the class or racial or gender identities it occludes? Why challenge truth if not in the interests of revealing the potentially manipulative powers of the discourses that have attained the status of knowledge? Why call science in question if not in part because of the military and ecological catastrophes to which the blind pursuit of its instrumental rationality has delivered us? Why problematize the artistic canon and its modes of aesthetic discrimination if not to draw attention to the ways in which art can collude with the values of the establishment and serve to reinforce its power elites? In other words, in so far as we want to cling to some of the insights of post-structuralist theory, we seem caught up in ways of explaining and justifying this inclination in terms which, strictly speaking, only make sense if we are prepared to defend certain forms of truth, ethical value and political principle.

All this could be rephrased in the form of a critique of the inconsistency of postmodernist critique: an inconsistency which, if brought to the surface, would seem to blur any clear-cut demarcation between the relativists and realists, ironists and metaphysicians. One could, moreover, illustrate this inconsistency as it surfaces in a number of differing concerns or domains of theoretical engagement. I shall here explore the idea a little further, with reference to cultural value and the position of the subject.

### Aesthetic Discrimination and Subjectivity

We know how important deconstructive approaches in cultural criticism have been in illuminating the ways in which appeal to the 'freedom' and transcendent values of the artistic work can screen out consideration of its ideological function—preserve it from the scrutiny of the political values it may sustain, however unconsciously. An exclusive concern with the formal and aesthetic value of cultural production can in this sense legitimate various forms of reaction and elitism, and allow the critic to ward off all minority challenges to the canon by dismissing them as politically—therefore improperly—motivated. As Christopher Lasch has put it, 'the more intellectual purity identifies itself with "value-free" investigations, the more it empties itself of political content, and the easier it is for public officials to tolerate it.' This gains 'the cooperation of writers, teachers and artists not as paid propagandists or state-censored timeservers, but as so-called "free" intellectuals capable of policing their own jurisdictions'.<sup>3</sup> So far so

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Agency of the American Left*, London 1970, pp. 94–5. See Alan Sinfield's discussion, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, Oxford 1989, pp. 102–5. I would like to acknowledge a debt in my thinking on these issues to Michèle Barratt's discussion of aesthetic value in 'Max Raphael and the Question of Aesthetics',

good. But if we ask in whose interests we are deconstructing this notion of aesthetic value and cultural freedom, we shall almost certainly be referred by the critic to all those marginalized or minority identities (women, blacks, sexual and ethnic groupings, and so forth) who have been colonized or suppressed in the name of the purity of art. We may also be told that it is to allow popular tastes and interests to be released from the puritanism or condescension of elitist value commitments. The problem, however, is that such justifications paradoxically invoke the cultural and judgmental freedom they deny. For unless we arbitrarily call a halt to the logic of discourse theory, why should we not deny the freedom of these liberated 'identities'? Why not view them in turn as the unconscious agents of someone else's cultural policing, as themselves constructed subjects blind to the propagandist purposes they are serving in the discourse which claims their liberation?<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, unless critics are prepared to engage in aesthetic discrimination concerning the intrinsic quality of cultural production, it is difficult to see why they are so keen to challenge the canonical status of certain works or to lay claim to the preserve of 'high' art. Unless we think there is something unique about art, that it has special powers to move and excite and illuminate, then why enter into any ideological contest over it? Why be any less happy to let its established practitioners be the guardians of its standards than we are, say, in the case of mathematics? The answer, surely, is that we *do* think art is distinctive in being reducible neither to a matter of formal skills and achievements, nor to a matter of ideology and cultural history. To put the point crudely, if we want to claim art for 'our' politics, it is in virtue of its possessing qualities and standards internal to itself and demanding a specific aesthetic appraisal. To go forward, then, from the insight shed by deconstructive strategies, we need both to defend the political and ethical values underpinning them, and to relate these to value commitments of a more purely formal character. Because in the end, what we want is more people to have access to the liberation and particular pleasures of high-quality cultural production. We are talking about cultural strategies that implicitly aim at the development of a more acute and educated aesthetic sensibility within a political programme where this is conceived as an integral component of self-realization and cultural emancipation.

Clearly all these considerations bear directly on the question of the subject, a site where all the lurking inconsistencies of the post-structuralist approach tend to converge; and a site where, in a sense, we feel this most intensely because it is reflected very directly in our own psychical

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<sup>5</sup> (cont.)

NLA 161, January–February 1987, and to Terry Eagleton's *The Function of Criticism*, London 1984; and his chapter on 'Marxism and Aesthetic Value' in *Criticism and Ideology*, London 1976.

<sup>6</sup> This is not in any sense to imply that challenges to the canon should not be made, nor that those who make them do so on what they explicitly recognize to be non-aesthetic grounds—on the grounds, for example, that works should be studied because they represent minority interests. My point, rather, is that the justifications for such non-aesthetic criteria may ultimately rely, at a more implicit level, on arguments which tend to undermine those invoked by critics, like Lasch, when they query art's claims to autonomy.

experience. That is, even as we acknowledge ourselves to be decentred and fragmented subjectivities, the gendered constructs of patriarchy, and the mouthpieces of a discursive ventriloquism, we also seem to rediscover a centre, the existential, angst-ridden self who must also make sense of it, and seek to reorganize desire, reread the world, adjust behaviour and so on, in the light of that awareness. As anti-humanist approaches present us as splintered, we feel a very humanist splintering between the self who acknowledges the Freudian or feminist challenge to autonomy, and the self who feels called upon to act as a morally responsible agent of self-change.

It may be objected that I am speaking here only to the experience of a handful of academics and left-wing intellectuals, and that this provides no basis for any more general claims about contemporary forms of self-appraisal. This is true in the sense that only they are likely to acknowledge and articulate the theoretical sources of any change in perspective. But I think it would be mistaken all the same to underestimate the extent of the influence of psychoanalysis and feminism in bringing about a broader shift of approach to questions of self-knowledge, and indeed in generating what we may regard as a fairly universal but specifically modern reflexivity in attitudes to selfhood. Thus it would seem difficult to account for the depth and scope of the revolution in thinking occasioned by feminism without assuming a fairly extensive 'anti-humanist' conception of the self as the involuntary construct of gender conventions to which one had previously been relatively blind, and indeed not experienced as conventions at all but rather as some natural dimension of personality. Psychoanalysis, for its part, can be said to have influenced an appraisal of one's adult life in the light of childhood formation, which is by no means confined to those familiar with Freud's writings. Moreover, in so far as feminism has itself employed psychoanalytic insights in directing attention to the effect on gender formation of 'mother-dominated' nurturing, oedipal responses, the symbolic order of patriarchy and so on, it has tended to complement the Freudian retrospection on the role of infantile experience in determining adult responses.

This is not to suggest that pre-Freudian culture did not engage in quite considered reflections of this kind (one has only to recall Wordsworth's 'Immortality' ode or Mill's *Autobiography* to acknowledge this); nor is it to suggest that there is not a certain pre- and post-Freudian continuity in their quality. But there is a break, too, (marked, perhaps most notably, by the disappearance of the sense of childhood as 'lost innocence'), and certainly, I think, we have seen the emergence of a specifically modern scepticism or diffidence about the extent to which the individual can invoke his or her conscious experience as if it were the whole of what could be known about the self—as if this form of self-knowledge were exhaustive of everything that could feasibly enter into an expression of individuality.

### An Ethics of Self-Change

If this is the case, then arguably it introduces a rather particular form of ethical self-awareness, and this paradoxically invites a more 'humanist' understanding of agency and self-change even as it derives

its quality from the 'anti-humanist' perspectives we bring to bear on ourselves. The particular tension here has to do with the fact that if we recognize ourselves to be the 'constructs' of *social* forces, we can no longer so readily appeal to *nature* (that is, to our personality or to how we just 'happen' to be and so forth) as the obstacle to self-change. We have become, one might say, more alert to the fact that not only is the appeal to the 'naturalness' of the emotions lodged in our breast no 'excuse' for them, but is itself possibly to be viewed as a manifestation of our resistance to altering them. In this sense, we may feel an existentialist responsibility to changing the social forces through which we acknowledge ourselves to have been 'constructed'; but at the same time—and here is the rub—in recognizing the extent to which we are 'constructed' selves, we also recognize and pay due heed to all those reasons we are so resistant to altering our ways, and may indeed not manage to achieve this however hard we try. In other words, we frequently confront situations where an acute sense of responsibility for self-change goes together with a no less acute understanding of why this cannot be viewed simply in terms of an existential project, and why it would be too purely voluntaristic to suppose that it could. Anyone who has been caught up in the transformation of attitudes to gender and sexuality as a consequence of feminism will know that what makes the adjustment of behaviour peculiarly fraught is not so much any overt ideological resistance to feminist demands, but relates rather to a tension between these 'autonomous' and 'non-autonomous' moments of selfhood. The 'identities' we seek to change (and which, in changing, we know ourselves to be contributing to changes in the conventions through which identity is constructed) are also those we cannot entirely override, and whose desires it would be pointless to attempt to ignore.

These tensions, moreover, have their particular effects not only in respect of the ethics of self-change, but also on the considerations we bring to bear in determining what is moral in our responses to the behaviour of others. In other words, they present us with dilemmas that are indisputably ethical in character, but also very much the product of current discourse and understanding, and therefore to be viewed as historically relative. For example, those situations that invite quite different behavioural responses depending on whether we view them in the light of feminist or psychoanalytic perspectives, or approach them more conventionally—that is to say, as situations involving free agents whose conscious expressions of feeling demand our sympathy, and come with certain entitlements to respect. How far should we be prepared to cause offence or pain to others (especially where our relations with them are particularly sensitive, as with parents or friends) by exposing, say, their unconscious sexism? When a father asserts his parental authority in disciplining his children, is he bringing them up well or reaffirming patriarchal power? How far should we view our adult affections as the freely bestowed gifts of one autonomous subject upon another, how far as the legacy of infantile needs, dependencies and aggressions?

Such questions are complex, and posed quite possibly in terms many would want to contest; I can do no more than gesture at them here.

But a summary way of stating them might be to say that anti-humanist challenges to the sovereign subject have permitted forms of self-scrutiny and awareness which seem both liberating and essential to the establishment of better human relations; but they are also unsettling precisely because of their desanctifying effect on former conceptions of love and sexuality, because they seem an obstacle to a more unthinking and spontaneous affective and erotic response, and because of the particular nature of the ethical demands with which they confront us. Of course I recognize that this summary statement is saturated with humanistic value assumptions. But how else can I state it? How else can a metaphysician like myself give voice to her equivocations?

But finally, let me shift from talking about equivocations and inconsistencies to consider what these may imply for a post-poststructural programme in which we acknowledge more openly the latent metaphysical dependencies of the critical attempt to suppress value, without giving up on the gains which that critical move has brought us. At issue here is the possibility of a more synthetic approach, one which combines alertness to the deficiencies and crudeness of much traditional value-discourse with alertness to the self-defeating quality of the attempt to avoid all principled positions in theory. This would be a kind of Kantian programme in the sense that it would involve a critique of pure value: it would submit the 'transcendental signifiers' to the scrutiny of sceptical and relativist appraisals in order to acquire a better sense of the minimal value-commitments essential to the critical power of social and cultural theory. It would involve giving up the grand-narrative idea of a single truth, without giving up the idea of truth as a regulative ideal—something we should attain to in all our behaviours and critical responses. It would insist on bringing judgments of quality to cultural production without allowing that the traditional formal values of 'high' art provide their only criteria. It would acknowledge the constructed nature of subjectivity without supposing that this makes all humanist questions of ethics and agency redundant. I believe that only an approach of this kind will prevent a retrogressive reaction. In other words, I think it is only by means of a re-engagement with value, informed and tempered by the rationalities which tended to its suppression, that a healthy postmodernist self-criticism will avoid reversion to an unhealthy legitimization of the unreconstructed modes of thinking that were the just target of initial attack.

I recognize, of course, that there is a riposte to all this, which is a kind of last laugh at the very idea that inconsistency or self-subversion could worry a mode of reflection that had cut loose from the logic of logocentrism. Only an old-fashioned metaphysician, who had failed to understand the full significance of the disruption to the values of consistency wrought by the critique of presence, could think that she could trouble a difference-theory perspective or reclaim it for value by pointing to its self-subverting quality. This, certainly, is the real impasse, the interface where the transition from dream to reality occurs—where one mentality stands poised to swallow the other. But it is also the point where I shall emit a last growl to the effect that there is, then, no point in communing further.

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## POWER POLITICS TODAY

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Michael Rogers

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Peter Gowan

**The Gulf War and Liberalism**

John Wiener

**Bush's Hidden Agenda**

Gege Skjeie

**Women's Advance in Norway**

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The Gulf war shone a spotlight on political processes and ideologies. Decisions to go to war require a greater depth of political motivation than the routine conduct of foreign policy. While the naked assertion of national and economic interest carries with it a certain constituency, the launching of war requires a wider coalition to be built and more idealistic justifications to be offered. Popular support for the Gulf war was won by weaving a narrative which promised that defeat for Saddam Hussein would lead to the triumph of human rights and democracy. Yet, in the event, states' rights prevailed over human rights, and only the freedom of those riding the chariot wheels of the Western way of life was allowed to triumph. In this issue we publish a variety of articles on the workings of Western political systems. Peter Gowan addresses attempts to justify the launching of hostilities against Iraq by recourse to liberal theory and the doctrine of the just war. He draws attention to the vital role of context in determining what type of explanation or justification is offered for Western actions. Thus the public speeches of President Bush can be relied on for an elevated discourse that plays down US imperial interests or the oil factor. On the other hand, a think-tank strategist who argued for a course of action in the Gulf simply on the grounds that it would promote democracy or popular welfare would be regarded as soft in the head. Gowan shows that US policy systematically transgressed liberal principles, but also that liberalism does not possess the categories needed for understanding the nature of contemporary power systems, nor for adjudicating the conflicts they produce. While Gowan criticizes the ideologies offered in justification of US policy, Jon Wiener advances evidence to show that the timing of Bush's option for war was decisively affected by domestic political calculations.

Noam Chomsky has long been a most insightful and courageous critic of US foreign policy and of the institutional complex which produces that policy. In this issue Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers explore the presuppositions of Chomsky's social theory, showing its links to his work in linguistics, and the influence of anarchism on his thought. In their view Chomsky's optimistic assessment of the human capacity for self-government receives significant support from the findings of his researches into the development of language. Cohen and Rogers qualify Chomsky's account at some points—arguing, for example, that the

media are not always such effective promoters of the ruling paradigm as Chomsky maintains—but nevertheless they find much to endorse in his indictment of dominant institutions and of the misinformation systems that help them secure a measure of popular consent to Washington's realpolitik.

In NLR 186 Ellen DuBois pointed out that social formations dominated by smallholding and influenced by Protestant moralism—Scandinavia, Canada, parts of the American Midwest, Australia and New Zealand—had historically proved hospitable to political advance for women. In this issue of the Review, Hege Skjeie explores the uneven but striking feminization of Norwegian politics. It has been suggested that the generous integration of women within Norwegian political structures coincides with the latter's loss of effective power over national life. Hege Skjeie finds this to be too sweeping a thesis, and one that wrongly neglects the pressure on political institutions exercised by women themselves.

From an ecological perspective it is sometimes held that the Marxist account of historical progress is vitiated by the positive value it accords to human lordship over nature. In NLR 178 Ted Benton argued that Marx's conception of the productive process dwelt too exclusively on the propensities of human labour, neglecting the essential contribution of natural processes, especially in agriculture. In this issue Reiner Grundmann dissents from Benton's argument and contests what he sees as a widespread tendency to romanticize and anthropomorphize nature. He argues that there is no alternative to an anthropocentric evaluation of nature since no values are immanent in nature itself. In this view ecology represents the highest form of the 'domination of nature' even if the naive discourse of romantic ecologists remains unaware of this fact. Grundmann argues that polluted rivers in which algae flourish represent a problem only within a human perspective. Grundmann's thoughtful riposte aims to clarify the presuppositions of ecological thought and to show the strengths of the classical formulations of historical materialism concerning human insertion in nature.

When the newly elected Hungarian assembly met, no party wanted to be seated on the Left of the Chamber. Yet, as Iván and Szonja Szélényi argue, there is some reason to believe that latent support exists in Eastern Europe for a social-democratic style of politics—an analysis confirmed, perhaps, by the recent victory of the Hungarian Socialist Party in a suburb of Budapest.

Finally it is with great sadness that we learn of the death of Eric Heffer. Eric was a member of the Editorial Board of *NLR* in 1961–63 and became a much-valued counsellor to the team that was then given responsibility for editing the journal. Most recently in *NLR* 143 and *NLR* 158 Eric contributed characteristically trenchant and thoughtful analysis of the problems of the Labour Party. Whether as shop steward or councillor, MP, National Executive Committee member or minister of state, his commitment to the cause of those who elected him never wavered. And as a fighter for the cause of Liverpool and of the working class he remained passionately involved in the struggle to strengthen socialist ideas. His courage, integrity and intellectual curiosity will be sorely missed. His autobiography *Never a Yes Man* will be published by Verso in September.

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Joshua Cohen  
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## Knowledge, Morality and Hope: The Social Thought of Noam Chomsky

In his first published essay on politics, Noam Chomsky announced his conviction that '[i]t is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies.'<sup>1</sup> Acting on that conviction, Chomsky has long supplemented his work in linguistics with writing on contemporary political affairs, focusing principally on the politics of the Middle East, the immorality of US foreign policy, and the role of American mass media and intellectuals in disguising and rationalizing that policy.<sup>2</sup> By contrast with his work in linguistics, which is principally theoretical, Chomsky's political writings in the main address more straightforwardly factual questions. As he emphasizes, these can be settled without special methods or training, and their significance can be appreciated through the application of common-sense norms and beliefs (for example, that aggression is wrong, concentrated power is dangerous, and citizens have greater responsibility for the policies of their own country than for those of other states), as aided by 'a bit of open-mindedness, normal intelligence, and healthy scepticism.'<sup>3</sup>

The characteristic focus, intensity and hopefulness of Chomsky's political writings, however, reflect a set of more fundamental views about human nature, justice and social order that are not simple matters of fact. This article explores these more fundamental ideas, the central elements in Chomsky's social thought. We begin (section I) by sketching the relevant features of Chomsky's conception of human nature. We then examine his libertarian social ideals (section II), and views on social stability and social evolution (section III), both of which are animated by this conception of our nature.

To anticipate what follows, we take Chomsky's social views to be marked by four key claims: (1) human beings have a 'moral nature' and a fundamental interest in autonomy; (2) these basic features of our nature support a libertarian socialist social ideal; (3) the interest in autonomy and the moral nature of human beings help to explain certain important features of actual social systems, including for example the use of deception and force to sustain unjust conditions, as well as their historical evolution; and (4) these same features of human nature provide reasons for hope that the terms of social order will improve from a moral point of view. Thus stated, these four claims are clearly neither concrete nor precise. But neither are they vacuous. They provide what we take to be a distinctive, optimistic perspective on human beings and human possibilities. The exposition that follows aims principally at a sympathetic clarification of this perspective. While our discussion is often critical, the criticisms themselves are intended to clarify Chomsky's views and to underscore deeper points of agreement with them.

Before turning to that discussion, however, a cautionary remark about the character and self-conception of Chomsky's work in this area is in order. Most important, Chomsky does not have a *theory* of society or justice, in the sense of a clearly elaborated and defended set of fundamental principles. In fact, he believes that significant progress in ethical and social inquiry requires a systematic theory of human nature, something that does not now (and may never) exist,<sup>4</sup> and that in the absence of such a theory social and ethical thought must rely on relatively speculative and imprecise ideas ('guesses, hopes, expectations').<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Chomsky denies any originality for his social and ethical views, identifying himself as a merely 'derivative fellow traveller'<sup>6</sup> in the anarchist and libertarian socialist traditions.

<sup>1</sup> 'The Responsibility of Intellectuals' (1967), in N. Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins: Historical and Political Essays*, New York 1969, p. 325. References to Chomsky's work that appear in the footnotes are intended only to support the claims we make about his views, not to provide an exhaustive inventory of relevant passages.

<sup>2</sup> Chomsky also, of course, has long engaged in more direct forms of political activism, including civil disobedience.

<sup>3</sup> *Language and Responsibility*, New York 1977, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Chomsky's own work in linguistics may be understood as a contribution to the development of such a theory, but he would be the first to assert its distance from a complete and systematic account.

<sup>5</sup> *Language and Politics*, edited by Carlos P. Otero, Montreal 1988, p. 756.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Relevance of Anarcho-Syndicalism', in *Radical Priorities*, edited by Carlos P. Otero, Montreal 1981, p. 247.

Finally, and no doubt in part owing to his conviction that his social and ethical views are neither systematically developed nor original, Chomsky presents those views in an occasional and sketchy fashion. Almost always announced as speculative, and often advanced only in response to promptings from interviewers, their presentation commonly takes the form of quotation from and endorsement of certain views of other thinkers (for example, Rousseau, Kant, Humboldt and Marx).<sup>7</sup> Apart from creating natural difficulties for any attempt at systematic summary, the character of Chomsky's presentation underscores the need for caution in reading more into, or expecting more of, his work in this area than he invites. We hope that we have heeded our own warning in what follows.

## I What Can We Know? Rationalism Romanticized

As already noted, Chomsky believes that a substantive conception of human nature must play a central role in both the ethical assessment of social arrangements and in the explanation of their operation. By a 'conception of human nature' he means an account of the biological endowment of the human species, and in particular the aspects of that endowment that figure in the development of human cognitive systems—aspects that are common to all human beings (excepting those suffering from pathologies) and perhaps unique to the human species. At its core, Chomsky's own conception of human nature draws together a romantic emphasis on the distinctive human capacity for creative expression and a rationalist contention that there is an intrinsic and determinate structure to the human mind.<sup>8</sup> In his work, these romantic and rationalist strands are joined through the contention that the intrinsic structure of mind provides a framework of principles that underwrites the possibility of the relevant forms of creative activity, while at the same time limiting the attainable forms of human expression.<sup>9</sup>

This conception of human nature is most fully developed in Chomsky's linguistic theory, which emphasizes both the *creativity* exhibited by normal human language use and the *modularity* of the human language faculty.<sup>10</sup> According to Chomsky, the 'fundamental

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, 'Language and Freedom' (1970) and 'Notes on Anarchism' (1973), in *For Reasons of State*, New York 1973; 'The Relevance of Anarcho-Syndicalism'.

<sup>8</sup> On the background in rationalism and romanticism, see *Cartesian Linguistics*, New York 1966; 'Language and Freedom', pp. 402–403; *Language and Mind*, New York 1972, pp. 76–7.

<sup>9</sup> In the case of language, Chomsky's idea was to secure the connection between creativity and rules—to show what enables us, as Humboldt put it, to 'make infinite use of finite means'—by incorporating recursive rules into a representation of the grammatical knowledge of ordinary speakers. For discussion of the role of recursive rules in solving Humboldt's problem, see *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Cambridge, Mass. 1965, p. 8; *Language and Politics*, p. 146, and the striking remark 'I think that the ideal situation would have been to have someone in 1940 who was steeped in rationalist and romantic literary and aesthetic theory and also happened to know modern mathematics.'

<sup>10</sup> The discussion that follows draws on various remarks that Chomsky makes about the connections between his views about language, human nature and politics. For a representative sample, see *Cartesian Linguistics*, pp. 24–6, 91–3; 'Language and Freedom';

fact about the normal use of language'<sup>11</sup> is its 'creative aspect'. Human beings have the capacity for a potentially *unbounded novelty* in the production of utterances that are *appropriate* to their circumstances, but that are not *controlled* by immediate stimuli (though they are commonly prompted by such stimuli). The linguistic knowledge expressed in such creativity is acquired by virtually all human beings in a relatively short period of time, and in the face of unstructured and impoverished inputs from the environment. Given this 'poverty of the stimulus', Chomsky argues that language acquisition can plausibly be explained only on the assumption that human nature includes a language 'module'—an innate system of language-specific principles, or 'universal grammar'.

Chomsky's more general remarks about human nature are fuelled by the speculation that these ideas about creativity and modularity in the domain of language might have more general application, and that the theory of language might suggest a paradigm for a more general account of our nature. Thus he notes that 'at some very deep and abstract level some sort of common-core conception of human nature and the human drive for freedom and the right to be free of external coercion and control' of the kind that figures 'in a relatively clear and precise way in my work on language and thought' also 'animates my social and political concerns'.<sup>12</sup>

### Language and Human Nature

To understand how the ideas featured in the linguistic theory might be extended to provide a broader account of human nature, consider first the modularity hypothesis. In areas other than language—for instance, vision, scientific reasoning, aesthetic and moral judgment—human beings might be thought to attain complex and determinate cognitive systems in the face of relatively impoverished data, thus suggesting the presence of modules governing cognitive development in these other domains as well. For example, human beings appear to

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<sup>11</sup> (*cont.*)

'Equality, Language Development (1976), Human Intelligence, and Social Organization', in *The Chomsky Reader*, edited by James Peck, New York 1987, pp. 195–9; *Language and Problems of Knowledge: The Massachusetts Lectures*, Cambridge, Mass. 1988, ch. 5; *Language and Politics*, pp. 143–8, 240–46, 318, 385–7, 402–3, 468–9, 566–7, 593–4, 696–7, 755–6. In these passages Chomsky does not separate, as we do, issues of modularity and creativity in considering the relevance of the understanding of human language for a more general theory of human nature. But the passages listed above suggest the relevance of both, and they are, so far as we understand, independent. Thus, the existence of a visual module employing a rigidity principle in the interpretation of visual experience does not imply anything about the creative use of visual perception (whatever that might mean). And the absence of a module in a particular domain is consistent, at least in principle, with creativity since the latter might reflect general features of human reason (as Descartes seems to have thought). Finally, the relevance (such as it is) of the study of human language to a more general theory of human nature is not affected, so far as we understand, by the shift from a conception of language in terms of rule systems to Chomsky's more recent 'principle-and-parameters' view. For discussion of the shift in the account of language, see *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use*, New York 1986; *Language and Problems of Knowledge*.

<sup>12</sup> *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> *Language and Politics*, pp. 696–7.



have a moral nature. That is, there appears to be a natural human tendency to interpret human interaction in moral terms—to display a concern about the justifiability of actions in light of their effects on the well-being of others. That concern is manifest in, among other things, complex systems of moral judgment that are deployed in response both to actual problems and to the hypothetical cases of moral philosophy; furthermore, these systems appear to go well beyond anything that might plausibly be found in the ‘impoverished and indeterminate’ data available to a child who receives moral instruction.<sup>13</sup> The hypothesis of moral modularity would explain the acquisition of a system of moral understanding in part in terms of a set of intrinsic features of mind that are specific to morality. A characterization of the moral module would of course need to be consistent with the variety of moral systems, but it would also impose limits on possible human moralities. Thus, features of it might help to explain certain formal properties that are allegedly displayed in systems of moral understanding (for example, why moral conceptions are either deontological or teleological, or why moral norms feature elements of symmetry, generality and impartiality) and/or certain substantive features that seem to be common in moral systems (for example, prohibitions against killing innocents, wantonly imposing pain, or enslaving members of the community).<sup>14</sup>

Consider next a natural generalization of the creative aspect of language use. Here the thought would be that, by underwriting the acquisition of a variety of complex cognitive systems, our nature enables us to engage in creative activities that deploy those systems. Thus creativity would be a feature not just of language use but of moral judgment, common-sense understanding, and the use of that understanding in productive work, artistic activity and scientific achievement. Of course, a human potential for creativity might be joined with a desire for habit and repetition and a hatred or dread of novelty. But Chomsky’s contention is that, associated with the intrinsic possibilities for human creativity and underscoring their relevance for ethics and social explanation, there exists an innate propensity to pursue the forms of creative expression for which our nature suits us. Borrowing a phrase from Bakunin, Chomsky sometimes refers to this as an ‘instinct for freedom’.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere he suggests that we have not merely an instinct towards but also a need for such free activity, and that the failure to accommodate that need results in individual and social pathologies.<sup>16</sup> Taking the remarks about instinct and need together, Chomsky appears to endorse the view, associated with Aristotle, that human beings enjoy the exercise of their natural powers, with enjoyment perhaps scaled in part to the complexity of the activity in which those powers are engaged, and that we enjoy as well

<sup>13</sup> *Language and Problems of Knowledge*, p. 153.

<sup>14</sup> Orlando Patterson emphasizes that slaves are characteristically represented as outsiders to the community that enslaves them, as ‘naturally alienated’. See *Slavery and Social Death*, Cambridge, Mass. 1982, ch. 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Language and Problems of Knowledge*, p. 155.

<sup>16</sup> For example, ‘Language and Freedom’, p. 405.

the exercise by others of their powers, at least when we have the opportunity to engage in like activities ourselves.<sup>17</sup>

Certain features of this view strike us as significant and plausible. Much historical sociology testifies to the claim that there is a fundamental human interest in free activity (alongside other interests in some level of material comfort and in being treated with respect by others), and that human beings have a moral nature in the sense just described.<sup>18</sup> It is, for example, not implausible to explain the destruction of slavery, the development of religious pluralism, and the evolution of democratic ideals and their (admittedly highly imperfect) expression in social and political arrangements, in part by recourse to these basic features of human beings. It is less clear, however, that these matters are illuminated by considerations of modularity and creativity drawn from the theory of language. It may be the case, for example, that human beings have a moral nature but lack a specifically moral module. What underlies our acquisition of moral systems might instead be, as Kant supposed, intrinsic features of human reason as such. On this account, the construction of moral systems would not involve the deployment of principles specific to a moral faculty, but rather the application of a 'pure reason' to matters of human action.<sup>19</sup> This might be sufficient to account for moral competence—for the complexity and determinateness of human moralities, and the capacity to respond to novel cases in ways that transcend specific instruction—even if the parallel contention about the acquisition of linguistic knowledge is not at all plausible. We do not wish to defend this alternative perspective, but only to stress that the important contention that human beings have a moral nature does not depend for its plausibility on the assumption of a moral module.

Similarly, reflection on the creative aspect of language use does not seem to help in understanding human aspirations to self-directed activity—the fact that 'people really want to control their own affairs . . . [and] don't want to be pushed around, ordered, oppressed, etc.'<sup>20</sup> What is central to linguistic creativity is the capacity for unbounded novelty. But what matters to people in their aspirations to self-direction—to form conceptions of a decent life and to act on those conceptions—appears not to depend on the prospect of novelty of expression. For example, even if one were persuaded that one's artistic, craft or intellectual activities would issue in nothing novel, one's interest in pursuing that activity free of external control, without being 'pushed around', would be likely to remain undiminished.

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<sup>17</sup> On enjoying the activities of others, see 'Equality: Language Development, Human Intelligence, and Social Organization', pp. 198–9. For discussions of the 'Aristotelian principle' and its connection with the value of community, see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge 1971, pp. 424–33, 523–5 (the background in Humboldt is noted on p. 525, n. 4).

<sup>18</sup> For discussion of these features and their relevance to historical sociology, see Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Basis of Obedience and Revolt*, White Plains 1978, Roberto Unger, *Politics: A Work in Constructive Social Theory*, Part 1 *False Necessity*, Cambridge 1987; Joshua Cohen, 'The Moral Arc of the Universe. The Case of Slavery', n.p. 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Part I, Book I, trans. Lewis White Beck, Indianapolis 1956.

<sup>20</sup> *Language and Politics*, p. 756.

In sum, we agree with Chomsky's claims about our moral nature and 'instinct for freedom', but are less persuaded by the suggestions about how these features of human nature might be understood on the model of the theory of language. Reflecting this conclusion, our references in what follows to Chomsky's 'conception of human nature' will be confined to the fundamental points of agreement.

## II What Ought We to Do?

Chomsky's normative views, and in particular his account of a good society, are set against the background of his conception of human nature, and the conception of an instinct for freedom that lies at its heart. In outline, Chomsky takes freedom to be the supreme human good, and endorses the libertarian principle that the evaluation of social arrangements should proceed by considering whether those arrangements impose tighter limits on human activity than are necessary, given existing material and cultural constraints.<sup>21</sup> This, of course, is not an especially determinate view. Embracing the supreme value of freedom, and endorsing the principle that unnecessary constraints on it should be eliminated, does not settle issues about the appropriate treatment of time trade-offs (for example, the relative importance of freedom for present and future generations) or distributional issues (in particular, whether it is legitimate to trade the freedom of some for the freedom of others). Still, the conception is not empty. According to Chomsky, indeed, it supports a particular ideal for human beings operating under the material and cultural constraints of modern industrial societies—namely, socialist anarchism. The best known of his ethical-political views, Chomsky's anarchism is worth exploring at length.

It may be useful here to distinguish two conceptions of anarchism, each of which figures in Chomsky's work. In the first, anarchism is represented not as a substantive 'doctrine' but as a 'historical tendency', a 'permanent strand of human history'.<sup>22</sup> Reflecting the human aspiration to freedom, this tendency underlies the emphasis on freedom as the supreme value in assessing social forms, and encourages scepticism about familiar contentions of the 'necessity' of social arrangements constraining freedom. To endorse anarchism in this sense is straightforward enough; it amounts to endorsing a critical standpoint in social thought and action, rooted in a concern to eliminate unnecessary constraints on human freedom.

The second sense in which Chomsky (more tentatively) invokes anarchism is less straightforward. Here anarchism does appear as a substantive, libertarian socialist, ideal of social order. Chomsky's anarchism is socialist in that it endorses the social ownership of the means of production, a form of ownership permitting the extension of democratic procedures to economic decisions both in individual

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<sup>21</sup> See 'Notes on Anarchism', p. 404, 'Equality: Language Development, Human Intelligence, and Social Organization', p. 195; *Language and Politics*, p. 147.

<sup>22</sup> 'Interview' (with James Peck), in *The Chomsky Reader*, p. 29; also 'Notes on Anarchism', p. 371.

workplaces and across the economy as a whole. What that means in detail is not explored at any length in his writings, but the essential principle is clear enough. The content of the more specifically *anarchist* aspect of his views, however, is less clear.

The basic idea of anarchism is that social cooperation can and should proceed without a state. But the content of that idea depends on the underlying conception of the state and its offending aspects—what is to be eliminated—and this has no single interpretation within the anarchist tradition. To locate Chomsky's views, it may help to begin by distinguishing three aspects of states that an anarchist might seek to eliminate—that states exercise coercive power at all, that they claim a legitimate monopoly on the exercise of coercive power, and that they specialize in the exercise of coercive power.<sup>23</sup> Corresponding to these three aspects of states are three distinct visions of social order, each of which has a claim to capture the basic anarchist ideal of state-free cooperation.

### Conceptions of the State and Social Order

The first conception is a *coercion-free system*. In such an order there is no state, in that socially organized coercion does not exist at all and is in fact unnecessary, since the members willingly comply with rules and standards that are publicly announced.<sup>24</sup> Chomsky's endorsement of anarchism seems not to depend on the thesis that a coercion-free system is possible. For example, he often cites the 1936 Spanish anarchist experiments as exemplary of anarchist practice, but they were hardly free of coercion.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, while he assumes that an anarchist order will reflect and further a 'spiritual transformation' of human beings, registered in much greater self-confidence and voluntary cooperation among them,<sup>26</sup> he seems to agree that it would be unreasonable to expect complete civic consciousness and a fully harmonious coordination of interests in a social order that operates on the scale of a modern society.<sup>27</sup> Thus he notes the likelihood that (in part because of popular empowerment) 'factions, conflicts, differences of interest and ideas and opinion' will be expressed throughout a libertarian socialist society.<sup>28</sup> Especially given his recognition of such a high degree of disagreement and conflict, it seems safe to assume that Chomsky recognizes as well the need for the continued existence of some agencies with powers of enforcement—if only to

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<sup>23</sup> Our discussion of Chomsky's anarchism has been greatly aided by Michael Taylor, *Community, Anarchy, and Liberty*, Cambridge 1982.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Berkman, for example, asserts that 'Anarchism teaches that we can live in a society where there is no compulsion of any kind.' See *What is Communist Anarchism?*, New York 1972, p. 182.

<sup>25</sup> 'Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship', in *American Power and the New Mandarins*, pp. 72–124.

<sup>26</sup> 'The Relevance of Anarcho-Syndicalism', p. 260.

<sup>27</sup> Drawing on a range of anthropological and historical studies, Michael Taylor argues that virtually all anarchist communities have relied on some scheme of social controls (threats and offers of sanction) to ensure compliance, and not simply on socialization and education. See Taylor, *Community, Anarchy, and Liberty*, pp. 39, 76ff.

<sup>28</sup> 'The Relevance of Anarcho-Syndicalism', p. 250.

assure those who were willing to comply that others would not take advantage of their compliance.

A second possibility, then, is a *dispersed-coercion system*. Recognizing the need for powers of enforcement, but concerned about the dangers of a concentration of power,<sup>29</sup> the anarchist might identify the ideal of statelessness with a condition in which no single institution successfully claims a legitimate monopoly on the use of force. Instead, enforcement powers would be dispersed across a set of institutions, each of which would nevertheless be specifically political—that is, defined chiefly by its administrative and enforcement powers. One example of a dispersed-coercion system might be an order governed by a variety of administrative agencies, each with its own enforcement capability. Another would be a territory featuring a variety of specifically protective associations, each providing security for certain people in the territory, but none with a monopoly on powers of enforcement.<sup>30</sup> But this view also fails to capture the core of Chomsky's anarchism. To see why, let us contrast it with a third interpretation of the ideal of state-free cooperation.

This third possibility is a system with *dispersed coercive powers*, but in which those powers, and all other traditionally political powers of collective decision-making and administration, are dispersed over institutions that do not *specialize* in the performance of political functions. Rather, on this conception, which we take to be Chomsky's own, political powers are exercised by institutions that also, and perhaps chiefly, perform other (for example, productive, associative) functions. Here, the 'statelessness' of society is achieved neither by the abolition of coercion (the coercion-free system), nor by the multiplication of its authoritative dispensers (the dispersed-coercion system), but by the transcendence of the traditional division of labour in governance between specialized political institutions that rule, and the rest of a society subject to their rule.

Several elements of Chomsky's view underscore the importance of the elimination of specialized political institutions, the distinguishing feature of this third interpretation of anarchism. Thus, he supports political representation, but imagines representation to be based on such 'organic groups' as workplace or community associations, and to feature a 'rather minimal' delegation of powers.<sup>31</sup> He sees the need for administration, but thinks that it ought to be a rotating 'part-time job' performed only 'by people who at all times continue to be participants in their own direct activity' (that is, who act in other capacities as well).<sup>32</sup> And while he does not think that political parties

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<sup>29</sup> Chomsky commonly emphasizes a general concern about concentrated power, suggesting that the nineteenth-century libertarians focused on concentrations of power in the State and Church, while twentieth-century libertarians (especially socialist anarchists) have extended such concerns to the concentration of economic power. See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 248, *Language and Politics*, pp. 301, 744.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, the discussion of the possibilities of providing protection within a state of nature in Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, New York 1974, pp. 12–17.

<sup>31</sup> 'The Relevance of Anarcho-Syndicalism', p. 249.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251

could legitimately be banned in an anarchist order, he does think that if parties, or any other specialized organizations with an exclusive devotion to political affairs, were 'felt to be necessary', then 'the anarchist organization of society will have failed'.<sup>33</sup>

Within this conception, for example, workers' councils and their representatives might have responsibility for economic planning, and the elaboration and enforcement of rules governing workplace relations (such as rules on occupational safety and health). Tasks traditionally assigned to local governments (the maintenance of local order, sanitation, primary education and the like) would devolve to neighbourhood associations composed of citizens active in other affairs. Regional and national tasks of government would be handled through recallable representatives of such groups. National defence would be assured through citizen militias. And so on. What is essential is that all traditional functions of government would be discharged by groups whose members also engaged in non-governing activities.

How plausible is this conception? Anarchist views are typically criticized for resting on implausible accounts of human motivation, for being inattentive to the ways that decentralization can exacerbate political and material inequalities, and for ignoring the attractions and requirements of economic efficiency. Chomsky's conception avoids at least the most obvious versions of these objections. As noted earlier, for example, he appears to reject accounts of human motivation that would deny the persistence of conflict and disagreement under anarchy. He endorses the idea of a framework of basic rights, and reasonably encompassing arrangements for making collective decisions and administering those decisions, and in these ways addresses some concerns about the pathologies of decentralization. And, responding to concerns about economic efficiency, he stresses that his view does not imply primitive communitarian economic production (the denial of all economies of scale and specialization), and indeed welcomes technological development and increased productivity, which contributes to free social cooperation by limiting the need for human toil. In fact, he thinks that anarchism really comes into its own as a social ideal only with a high level of development of the productive forces of society.

### The Weaknesses of Chomsky's Anarchism

We, however, are less convinced than Chomsky of the attractions of anarchism, for three reasons. First, we are simply unpersuaded that policies of, for example, economic coordination, environmental protection and public health are most efficiently made in the absence of specialized bodies, devoted to formulating policy alternatives and to assessing the likely consequences of their implementation. Assuming conditions of large-scale social interdependence, there are likely to be problematic third-party effects or 'externalities' in each of these areas (for example, a significant degree of pollution, affecting large populations, resulting from the actions of individuals and enterprises).

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

Such externalities, and the complex problems of policy planning and evaluation they pose, are not solely attributable to 'the irrational nature of [present] institutions'<sup>34</sup> and the incentives to selfish behaviour that they generate. In some important measure, they are intrinsic to social interdependence itself. If only because of problems of imperfect information, they can be expected to appear in an interdependent and technologically advanced society even under the most favourable of motivational conditions (for example, perfect altruism). Given the persistence of externalities and their attendant complexities, however, we doubt that any reordering of social institutions, however welcome, will simplify public policies to the point that reasonably efficient governance can become simply a 'part-time job'.<sup>35</sup>

Second, we would expect tensions between the proposed dispersion of political responsibility and the effective exercise of that responsibility. Underlying this concern is our assumption that actions needed to enforce the terms of order would be costly; that is, both detecting violations and sanctioning violators would generate costs for enforcers. For reasons familiar from the theory of public goods, the coexistence of dispersed benefits (those accruing to citizens in general from enforcement of the terms of the order) and concentrated costs (incurred by those who engage in enforcement) presents a situation ripe for 'free-riding', and a concomitant failure to provide appropriate levels of enforcement.

Such problems are, it should be said, much less pervasive in smaller-scale associations. Reduction of scale almost certainly makes violations more apparent, thus reducing the cost of their detection. And since association norms can be invoked in a process of informal sanctioning, this is also likely to reduce the cost of imposing sanctions, including sanction of those who decline to sanction others. But we are assuming a fairly large and complex association. Here, we believe, the problem of providing incentives to enforce the terms of the order has real bite. And here, a natural solution to the enforcement incentive problem is to establish specialized agencies for administration and enforcement. The specialization of agencies eases the task of providing incentives to enforcement, since those who work in them can be held accountable for their failures (for instance, by being removed from their positions). And it greatly simplifies the problem of monitoring enforcement performance, since the division of political labour enables citizens and their representatives to focus their inquiry on particular institutions and individuals.

Third, we doubt whether the proposed anarchist order would encourage the motivations necessary to its stability, in particular whether it would encourage the formation of a sense of justice comprehensive enough to include all members of the order. We noted earlier that Chomsky supposes that an anarchist order will encourage a 'spiritual transformation' of human beings. But it remains unclear how the sort of anarchism he endorses would elicit motivations of the required

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

kind. In particular, we assume that a stable democratic socialist scheme must ensure continuing relative equality among the participants in the order. It might be the case, for example, that considerable portions of the surplus generated in some enterprises would be used to benefit those in others. But how is a concern to preserve such equality of condition to be encouraged among citizens, assuming (what seems obvious) that it could not be counted on to emerge *spontaneously*?

Presumably the idea is that citizens acquire a sense of justice and a willingness to act on that sense through the normal course of their maturation. But if organic groups, based in particular workplaces or neighbourhoods, provide the basis of political cooperation, then it would seem natural that the principal allegiance of citizens would be to those organic groups. And if that were true, then a sense of justice supporting the distributive measures required to maintain the order would not be likely to form. One of the virtues of less organic and more 'alienated' political forms that are abstracted from everyday life—political parties, territorially defined representative bodies, and specialized organizations for making and enforcing collective decisions—is that they plausibly encourage the members of society to regard one another as equal *citizens*, deserving of justice whatever the particulars of their aspirations, class situation, or group affiliations. It seems likely that some such more cosmopolitan sense of citizenship, encouraged by less organic forms of political association, is necessary to provide the motivation needed to sustain the egalitarian background required of a genuinely democratic society.

Of course it may be that the establishment of specialized political bodies to address these problems would engender a concentration of power, and that such a concentration would produce greater threats to human freedom than those resulting from the absence of specialized political arrangements. This is, clearly, an empirical issue, and one about which we can only hope someday to have data. In the absence of more compelling evidence than we now have, however, Chomsky's anarchism seems to stand on relatively shaky grounds. This limits its appeal even to those who share his commitment to eliminating unnecessary constraints on human beings, and in particular constraints deriving from economic inequality.

### III What, If Anything, May We Hope For?

Setting these particular criticisms aside, Chomsky's account of human nature and the social conditions appropriate to its full expression naturally suggest two questions about contemporary societies. First, why are present social arrangements and the distribution of basic material resources and political power they provide so distant from the arrangements and distribution appropriate to human nature?<sup>36</sup> Second, given the distance between the actual and ideal, what reason is there for maintaining even the hope that current arrangements will

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<sup>36</sup> Chomsky indicates that this question arises naturally, given his views on human nature; see *Defending Democracy*, London 1991, p. 397.



come to approximate this ideal more closely? In this final section, we consider these questions in turn.

At least at an abstract level, Chomsky's answer to the first question is clear. Once an unjust order exists, those benefiting from it have both an *interest* in maintaining it and, by virtue of their social advantages, the *power* to do so. Maintenance is of course not in the interest of those who do not benefit from the order. So, dominant groups must use their power against subordinate ones to ensure the latter's consent or acquiescence to the unjust scheme. The basic mechanisms for achieving this are force and fraud. Either those who do not benefit must, in effect, be frightened and beaten into submission, or they must be distracted from their real interests and deliberately confused about the way the world works.

More particularly, Chomsky believes that the relative importance of force and fraud to social reproduction depends on the specific scheme of unjust distribution in place. Fascist orders and Stalinist 'socialism' are marked by the denial of liberties of expression, association and participation. Thus, while they feature well-developed propaganda systems, they rely primarily on force to suppress the natural aspiration to freedom. Capitalist democracies, by contrast, provide at least formal rights of expression, association and participation. While they feature considerable use of force, the availability of channels of expression and association increases the importance of what people think, and fraud accordingly plays a more central role in preserving order.<sup>37</sup> In capitalist democracy, the real 'enemy' of governing elites, their 'ultimate target', is the human mind itself.<sup>38</sup> The preservation of unjust advantage requires thought control, the deliberate 'manufacture of consent'.<sup>39</sup>

In elaborating these themes, Chomsky has focused principally on the role of the mass media in capitalist democracies, and then almost exclusively on the case of the media in the United States—a case marked, in comparative terms, by an apparently paradoxical combination of extreme media servility and minimal state control of those media.<sup>40</sup> These writings, some authored jointly with Edward Herman, present a 'propaganda model' of the media's *operation*—not, it may be stressed, of its *effects* on consciousness or behaviour (see discussion below, p. 20)—with two component parts.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See 'Manufacturing Consent' (1984) in *The Chomsky Reader*, pp. 131–2; *Detering Democracy*, ch. 12.

<sup>38</sup> *Turning the Tide: US Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace*, Boston 1985, pp. 234–6.

<sup>39</sup> The term, taken from Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, London 1932, provides the title for E. Herman and N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, New York 1988.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, *On Power and Ideology: The Magna Lectures*, Boston 1987, which notes that the US is near the 'libertarian end in the spectrum of existing societies' (p. 114) but that debate proceeds 'within very narrow limits' (p. 124).

<sup>41</sup> Herman and Chomsky, in *Manufacturing Consent*, use the term 'propaganda model' to refer just to the first of the two components discussed in the text. For reasons of terminological convenience we use the term to cover a wider range of Chomsky's views about the media. We do not assume, however, that Herman embraces all aspects of the propaganda model as it is characterized here.

## The Propaganda Model

The first component is the contention that the principal propagators of ideas in capitalist democracies (again, and throughout, particularly in the US) advance ideas that conform to elite interests. More specifically, the range of positions featured in the media, the issues that receive emphasis, the timing of stories, the sources that are treated as respectable, and the interpretation of the role of the media itself, are all '*highly functional* for established power and responsive to the needs of the government and major power groups' [emphasis added].<sup>43</sup>

The second component of the model is an account of the mechanisms of social power, and the particular organization of the media, that explain this 'highly functional' pattern. Here, in an account of *why* the media operates as it does, general propositions about the organization of capitalist democracies are fused with specific contentions about the role of four broad groups of social actors within such systems.

At the top are various interconnected elites, predominantly business elites (including those who own the media) and government elites (often the same as the former).<sup>43</sup> These actors, or at least important segments of them, appear to be relatively 'free of illusion', a freedom explained by the fact that a clear understanding of the world is essential to maintaining their privileged positions within it. ('The propaganda may be what it is, but dominant elites must have a clearer understanding among themselves.' <sup>44</sup>) Thus, capitalists need to know how the world works in order to compete successfully, and state managers need to know in order to serve the interests of business. Understanding their own interests and what is needed to advance them, and recognizing that their interests are commonly opposed to the interests of the rest of the population, the elites sow illusion outside their ranks.<sup>45</sup> In this connection, it should be noted that Chomsky thinks that '[m]ost people are not liars',<sup>46</sup> and that a low tolerance

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<sup>43</sup> Herman and Chomsky, p. xv.

<sup>43</sup> The account of the five filters advanced in Herman and Chomsky is basically a refined version of the conception of elite interests sketched here (though we have abstracted from their fifth filter, namely anti-communism). Thus they discuss the way that news is filtered through (1) the 'important common interests [that owners of major media share] with other major corporations, banks, and government' (p. 14); (2) the need of the media to sell an audience to advertisers who are interested in 'audiences with buying power' (p. 16), (3) the dependence of media on government and corporate sources of information (p. 19), and (4) the requirement of sensitivity to 'flak' produced by 'individuals or groups with substantial resources' (p. 26). The basic, 'guided market' model of explanation is that the power to fix what gets said is held by individuals and groups who have substantial resources, who have a reasonably good understanding of their interests, and who seek to ensure that what is said conforms to those interests.

<sup>44</sup> 'Interview', p. 45.

<sup>45</sup> In emphasizing that this policy is deliberately pursued, we do not mean to suggest that there is a conspiracy—that elites *explicitly coordinate* in the pursuit of a common interest in deception. On the other hand, the explanation is not a classical invisible-hand explanation, since the pattern of distortion is the result of deliberate acts of distortion by individuals.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

for cognitive dissonance leads most propagators of falsehood to self-deception; they tend to say what they believe, having first come to believe what they say. But Chomsky seems to except at least certain crucial elements of elites from this generalization, since he holds that they both know the truth and regularly deceive others about it.<sup>47</sup> Given his assumptions about normal people, such behaviour, which on his view was, for example, characteristic of the 'stunning lunatics and liars' who prosecuted the US effort in the Vietnam War, must be termed 'pathological'.<sup>48</sup>

A second group is composed of journalists and the 'secular priesthood' of (primarily) academic experts.<sup>49</sup> Members of this class typically attain their positions by propagating views that serve elite interests. But, displaying the normal human intolerance of conscious deception, they commonly come to believe what they say.<sup>50</sup>

A third group of actors is composed of the educated and politically active middle classes. They provide the 'primary targets'<sup>51</sup> for propaganda, since elites recognize that they could and would do enormous harm to existing arrangements of authority if told the truth. That they could do such harm is a function of their resources and political activism. That they would is a function of the fact that, as Chomsky puts it, 'most people are not gangsters'.<sup>52</sup> He believes, and believes clear-minded elites believe, that the middle class would not support immoral US policies if it knew the truth about them, which is why elites seek 'to prevent any knowledge or understanding' of those policies.<sup>53</sup>

A fourth group is composed of the politically immobilized lower classes. Members of this group benefit least from the operation of the system, and thus might be thought to pose the greatest threat to its continuance. But their lack of resources and difficulties with collective action ('They are not part of the system; they just watch.'<sup>54</sup>) in fact make them *less* threatening than the middle classes; they are as a consequence only a secondary target of the propaganda machine. Moreover, while the fact that members of this group are less highly

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<sup>47</sup> For example, in one interview Chomsky claims that 'The more intelligent people are just lying, but the less intelligent believe it.' See *Language and Politics*, p. 713.

<sup>48</sup> 'The Backroom Boys', in *For Reasons of State*, p. 3. Chomsky borrows the 'lunatics' phrase from then *New York Times* reporter Gloria Emerson.

<sup>49</sup> While Chomsky's earliest political essays focused on the 'secular priesthood', the emphasis in his writing shifted in the late 1970s to the role of the mass media in the manufacture of consent. At least part of the explanation may lie in the role that academic experts on Latin American politics played in opposing US policy in Central America in the 1980s. See, for example, the discussion of the report by the Latin American Studies Association in the 1984 Nicaraguan election, in Herman and Chomsky, ch. 3. For note of the relative unimportance of such opposition, however, see *Detering Democracy*, p. 105, n. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Chomsky often emphasizes that illusions about the operation of the world are most pronounced among such 'experts'. See, for example, 'Interview', p. 43.

<sup>51</sup> *Necessary Illusions. Thought Control in Democratic Societies*, Boston 1989, p. 47.

<sup>52</sup> *Language and Politics*, p. 373.

<sup>53</sup> 'Interview', pp. 48–9.

<sup>54</sup> *Language and Politics*, p. 685.

'educated', and thus less indoctrinated,<sup>55</sup> than other elements in the population, they are effectively discouraged from political activity by such distractions as spectator sports, lifestyle preoccupations, and 'religious fanaticism of an almost Khomeinist variety'.<sup>56</sup> Often profoundly alienated from the operation of the system, and thus susceptible to the attractions of 'charismatic figures who promise to lead them out of their problems and to attack either the powerful or some other bogeyman, the Jews or the homosexuals, or the communists, or whoever is identified as responsible for their troubles,'<sup>57</sup> they typically 'can be satisfied, it is hoped, with diversions and a regular dose of patriotic propaganda, and fulminations against assorted enemies.'<sup>58</sup>

As these last observations may suggest, Chomsky does not study the secondary target or popular culture in any detail. His work concentrates instead on the 'dominant intellectual culture and the values that guide it'<sup>59</sup>—the interactions among the first three groups just noted. To summarize, his claim is that the functional pattern of media propagation of ideas conforming to elite interests (the first component of the propaganda model) reflects a relatively conscious policy of deception pursued by elites, who act with the willing if unwitting support of intellectuals and journalists, and who are concerned to forestall the emergence of opposition to their power that would likely arise from a (middle class) population that knew the truth about their immoral aims and actions. Before assessing the force of this conception, two clarifications of its aims may be helpful.

First, and as emphasized above, the propaganda model is offered as an account of the operation of the major media, not of its effects. The model *in itself* neither states nor implies that ideological conformity in the target group(s) is actually produced by propaganda, or that ideological conformity is the principal cause of obedient behaviour, or even that ideological conformity exists. So the propaganda model would not be falsified if it were established that propaganda was unsuccessful in generating false beliefs, or that it was irrelevant to the production of consent, or that consent was produced by means other than illusion (such as self-interest or cynicism).<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the propaganda model is advanced in aid of understanding the *actual* manufacture of consent in capitalist democracies, and not simply as an account of the functioning of major media in them. Its interest and importance thus does depend on there being some real and significant effects of propaganda on social action,<sup>61</sup> and Chomsky in fact holds

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 765

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 602.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 765

<sup>58</sup> *Necessary Illusions*, pp. 47–8

<sup>59</sup> *The Culture of Terrorism*, Boston 1988, p. 3, and n. 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Necessary Illusions*, pp. 148–9.

<sup>61</sup> Chomsky himself states that he decided to focus his political writings on the operation of 'ideological institutions' for two reasons. The first was a 'judgment of importance', the second a matter of personal circumstances and abilities. And he says that considerations of the second kind would have been sufficient to lead him to concentrate on the ways in which schools, universities and media 'serve to indoctrinate and control'. *Language and Politics*, p. 372. But saying this is perfectly consistent with what we state in the text.

the view that propaganda efforts are successful in generating both illusion and consent.<sup>62</sup>

Second, it is no objection to the propaganda model to observe that the distortions featured in the major media are not complete fairy tales, utterly at odds with the facts. On the contrary, attention to the model's underlying mechanisms would suggest that distortions will be more often a matter of framing and emphasis than simple fabrication.<sup>63</sup> As already noted, for example, governing elites need to understand the world. But since they in part rely on the major media for information about the world, this imposes some truth constraints on reporting in those media (constraints more severe than those exerted on more 'yellow' or 'tabloid' journalism).<sup>64</sup>

### An Overstated Case?

Even with these qualifications noted, however, our assessment of the propaganda model is mixed. Chomsky presents reams of evidence for the model, most of it addressed to the first of its two components—that media representations are highly functional for elite interests. With copious documentation, he effectively makes the case that the bulk of information provided by the major media is extremely and systematically biased toward the maintenance of existing arrangements of power and advantage; that departures from orthodoxy, particularly among those who threaten to reach a more than miniscule audience, are deliberately sanctioned; and, above all, that debate about US foreign policy commonly proceeds within a set of presuppositions about the role of the United States in the world that are quite distorted but rarely even noted, much less disputed. With all this we are in agreement.

The recent Gulf war, for example, provided an advanced display of all these phenomena. Information supplied to the press was sharply restricted by American diplomatic and military personnel, while the restrictions themselves were barely noted or challenged. Accordingly, press 'coverage' of events, particularly in the US, consisted largely of canned human-interest stories, military briefings, and pool reports from sites selected by military authorities. Information unfavourable to the official US position—on, for example, the details of Iraqi peace initiatives before the war, or the destruction of Iraq during the war—was generally dismissed or not reported at all. Even the slightest departures from orthodoxy—for example, the fact that the Cable News Network actually offered reports from inside Iraq on war damage—were objects of high-ranking political attack. And the most preposterous and cynical statements of public officials—for example, George Bush's repeated declaration that 'America stands where it always has, against aggression, against those who would use force to replace the rule of law'—were repeated and amplified without critical comment.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example, *On Power and Ideology*, p. 128; *Necessary Illusions*, p. 148.

<sup>63</sup> Herman and Chomsky, pp. xiv–xv.

<sup>64</sup> *Necessary Illusions*, p. 151.

<sup>65</sup> For Chomsky's own criticisms of media coverage of events leading up to the Gulf war, see *Deterring Democracy*, ch. 6.

All in all, then, this was an almost laboratory-perfect demonstration of manipulation of and by the media.

Nonetheless, Chomsky's view of the media and the manufacture of consent seems overstated in three ways. First, the claim that business people and state managers are in the main relatively 'free of illusion' seems overdrawn, at least when that claim is offered (as Chomsky usually offers it) without substantial qualification. There is of course ample reason to believe that business and state elites are on the whole better informed about their interests than ordinary citizens, since they have more resources to acquire information, and, as a rule, greater incentives to ensure its accuracy. But they are not immune to 'ordinary' failures of human understanding (such as shortsightedness, excessive attention to the status quo), evidence of which is legion in the ranks of business and the state. Nor, critically, are they immune to the distortions of ideology, which not uncommonly grips elites with at least the force that it grips other citizens.

On the latter point, Chomsky himself provides evidence for a more complex picture in his essay on the 'Backroom Boys' who administered the US war on Vietnam.<sup>66</sup> The history he discusses there suggests that during and immediately after World War II, US policy-makers *did* operate with a relatively clear understanding of their interests, the requisite elements of a world order that would conform to those interests, and the content of the ideology needed to provide popular support for their imperial designs. Once the terms of the postwar world were set in place, however, political and economic elites themselves accepted the terms of postwar ideology, and clung to that ideology even when it no longer served their material interests. In particular, we find that by the 1960s, 'other and more irrational considerations (than the economic interests of US capital) may have come to predominate' in the prosecution of US policy in Southeast Asia,<sup>67</sup> as United States policy-makers were 'caught up' and 'trapped' by the 'fantasies' they had earlier devised as illusions for the public.<sup>68</sup> The lesson to be drawn from this example is, we think, straightforward. During some periods—for example, the ascendant period of a new world power—elites may be relatively free of illusion about their interests. During others, however, they may be much less so. But at no time does it seem warranted to assume that elite understanding, however clear about the short term, extends much beyond that.

Second, and closely related, the model's claim that elite-generated ideologies are always 'highly functional' for elite interests seems exaggerated. The 'Backroom Boys' example just given indicates otherwise; there, elites were not only trapped by illusions dysfunctional for their interests, but were as a consequence propagating such illusions. How

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<sup>66</sup> 'The Backroom Boys', in *For Reasons of State*.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 66. See also Chomsky's remarks about the 'persistence of . . . astonishing illusions' among presidential advisors and the existence of 'historical fantasies at high levels of decision-making'—'absurdities that must be taken seriously, given the vast resources of terror in the hands of those whose decisions are guided (or justified) by them.' Ibid., p. 165, n. 193, and the references there to *American Power and the New Mandarins*.

<sup>68</sup> 'The Backroom Boys', p. 54.

often and how significantly dysfunctionality is produced by such illusion (or by other mechanisms) is, of course, an empirical issue beyond the scope of this discussion. It seems plausible, however, to think that such investigation would yield other examples of elite propagation of ideologies that are not 'highly functional'. In the area of foreign policy, for example, the conviction that world 'order' must be supplied chiefly by the US—a notion that postwar elites did their best to encourage among the general population—now arguably inhibits rational elite response to a range of military and economic concerns occasioned by political transformation in Eastern Europe, turmoil in the Soviet Union, and abiding economic challenge from Western Europe and Japan.

Consider, for example, the Gulf war's effective definition of 'collective security' in the New World Order as the raising of foreign subsidies to pay for American military force. This might seem a perfectly rational US elite response to problems of military management after the decline of American hegemony. Crudely put, if a nation is less competitive in machine tools than in bombers, it makes sense for it to 'trade' in bombers. Collectively underwritten but American-led, such an arrangement might help stabilize the US comparative advantage in military power by defraying its costs, while offering continued US influence in the world disproportionate to its economic power.

It might. Or it might not. The underwriting project could get bogged down in ways that military threats themselves could not overcome. Celebration of the comparative advantages of American military power might lead to the neglect of other sources of power. First World needs for the submission of the Third World (against which force is most readily applied) might simply diminish, leading to a decline in the demand for American Hessians. And even if none of these things happened, the choice of the bomb trade may simply not be the best, or even close to the second-best, strategy for maintaining US dominance. It might after all be the case that more constructive uses of US resources—to educate its children or train its workforce, clean its environment or nationalize its health-care system, rebuild its material infrastructure or invest more in basic research—would benefit American elites substantially more than adoption of the mercenary route. At the very least, this question seems open.<sup>69</sup>

Third, we think Chomsky exaggerates the importance of the media's informational bias in explaining consent and stability in capitalist democracies. In entering this objection, a word of caution is in order. As noted earlier, commitment to the propaganda model itself does not imply commitment to the view that the media's informational bias is the fundamental source of ideological conformity, nor that ideological conformity is the fundamental source of consent (at least for the target

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<sup>69</sup> Adding further openness, or doubt, is the fact that American elites are divided, and what is functional for one elite group may not be functional for others. One consequence of this is that the predictive power of the propaganda model is diminished. Different popular ideologies may be equally functional for elites in general, but not for elites in particular. In these circumstances the model does not tell us which ideology will reign.

groups). Nevertheless, Chomsky's writings do suggest, at least as a general matter, commitment to both of these claims.<sup>70</sup> So it seems worthwhile to register our objection to the claim about the importance of ideology in producing consent.<sup>71</sup> Since, however, this is not a claim to which Chomsky is committed by the propaganda model, and is not a claim he makes *explicitly* in his work, we use the name 'Chomsky\*' in the following paragraph to underscore our uncertainty about attributing these views to him.

### Ideology and Consent

The source of our objection to Chomsky\*'s emphasis on the importance of ideology in producing consent is simple. Chomsky uses the term 'ideology' in a pejorative sense; the term denotes a system of false beliefs about the world, popular action in accord with which is favourable to the realization of dominant interests.<sup>72</sup> In our view, however, such false beliefs ('false consciousness') play a less central role in explaining consent than Chomsky\* suggests. Even individuals who know the ugly truth may consent for reasons of, for example, material self-interest, cynicism, fatigue, or simple lack of concern, and much evidence suggests that many *do* consent for some combination of these reasons. Survey data in the US (the country that has been the primary focus for Chomsky's political writings) regularly confirm a very widespread (exceeding the bounds of the 'secondary target') public conviction that public officials are corrupt, that the country is run in an undemocratic fashion, and that many public policies are immoral.<sup>73</sup> But this confirmation is provided in a context of profound *political stability*. This suggests that something other than illusion and ignorance are producing that stability.

An expansion on this suggestion may be used to conclude our discussion of the propaganda model. Consider the case of capitalist democracy, the social system in which, on Chomsky's view, propaganda plays the greatest role in producing stability. There, instead of explaining the generation of consent chiefly by reference to ideological mechanisms, one might rely on two, arguably more central, features of that system. First, the private control of investment featured in a capitalist democracy subordinates the interests of workers to those of capitalists (without profits there is no investment, and without

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<sup>70</sup> Chomsky does discuss several other sources of consent, agreeing for example with our view (presented in chapter 3 of J. Cohen and J. Rogers, *On Democracy*, New York 1983) that consent reflects the fact that the operation of capitalist democracies tends to channel political action into the pursuit of interests in short-term material gain and to enable individuals to satisfy those interests. See, for example, *Turning the Tide*, pp. 233–4. This, however, is consistent with the claims we attribute to him in the text, which concern the *fundamental* sources of ideological conformity and consent.

<sup>71</sup> That most people, we think, take Chomsky to be making a claim of this sort provides another motivation for engaging it.

<sup>72</sup> For a careful discussion of this and other senses of ideology, see Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of Critical Theory*, New York 1981.

<sup>73</sup> Chomsky is aware of this. See, for example, *Turning the Tide*, pp. 240–45. But while he takes it (properly in our view) as a basis for hope in achieving a better political system, he does not explore the limits it suggests to his own account of the stability of that system.



investment no jobs), and thus leads workers to restrain their demands on employers and the state. It also tends to focus those demands on material gain, a concern that can be in some measure satisfied within the system. Second, the characteristic inequalities of resources between capitalists and workers systematically favour the former as collective actors, providing further obstacles to organized opposition and further bases for worker consent to the system.<sup>74</sup>

Assuming that such an account seems generally plausible (an assumption that we do not propose to defend here), it has an additional attraction in this discussion, namely that one can accept it as consistent with endorsing our first two criticisms of the propaganda model and embracing that model's most central claims about media bias and the narrowness of debate. That is, once explanatory emphasis has been shifted onto non-ideological sources of consent, there is no difficulty in granting that elites are often confused, and that ideologies are not always highly functional for elite interests. At the same time, the view does not exclude ideology as a possible source of consent, let alone exclude the media as a source of its propagation. Indeed, by softening some of the claims made for the importance of propaganda, while admitting the central insights of the propaganda model, such an account of consent seems to us a natural way to highlight the force of Chomsky's work in this area.

### Expanding the Domain of Freedom

We come, finally, to Chomsky's views on social evolution, and the second question posed at the outset of this section. Why should one think that existing societies, structured in ways so hostile to the exercise of human freedom, might change in a direction more in keeping with that essential human capacity? Our discussion of Chomsky's view of social order (even admitting the amendments to that view we have suggested) underscores the force of this question, for it may suggest that he sees dominant groups as in some sense invincible. In light of that discussion, it is easy to see why he believes that the 'struggle for freedom and social justice' is 'unending, often grim',<sup>75</sup> and why political actors face 'temptations of disillusionment . . . many failures and only limited successes'.<sup>76</sup> But it may be more difficult to understand why he also thinks the struggle against oppression is 'never hopeless',<sup>77</sup> or to understand the grounds for his 'hope that our world can be transformed to "a world in which the creative spirit is alive, in which life is an adventure full of hope and joy, based rather upon the impulse to construct than upon the desire to retain what we possess or to seize what is possessed by others."' <sup>78</sup>

In Chomsky's view, the source of hope lies in human nature itself. He

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<sup>74</sup> For such an account, see Cohen and Rogers, ch. 3.

<sup>75</sup> 'Language and Freedom', p. 406.

<sup>76</sup> *Turning the Tide*, p. 253.

<sup>77</sup> 'Language and Freedom', p. 406; *Deterring Democracy*, p. 64.

<sup>78</sup> *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom. The Russell Lectures*, New York 1971, pp. 100-11. Chomsky is here quoting Bertrand Russell.

speculates that constraints on human freedom that are not 'required for survival in the particular state of history' will tend to be sloughed off, as a result of the moral nature of human beings, the 'instinct for freedom', and the 'continual efforts to overcome authoritarian structures and to expand the domain of freedom' that result from that instinct.<sup>79</sup> Put otherwise, systems that impose unnecessary constraints on natural tendencies to human expression will, by that very fact, face intrinsic sources of instability. The significance of these destabilizing pressures for reform will of course depend on a range of factors relevant to political mobilization—including the number of people who feel the constraints of existing order, the capacities for and willingness to pay the costs of collective action on the part of those who do, the willingness of dominant groups to repress or murder their own populations, the power of foreign states to thwart mass action, and the strategic choices of opponents of oppressive regimes. Still, such pressures are present, and their presence suggests a weak evolutionary tendency toward societies more accommodating of human freedom.

Illustrating these claims about basic human nature and the pressures it exerts on unjust arrangements, Chomsky suggests, for example, that the 'propaganda system' in the United States—its tremendous power and durability notwithstanding—is 'extremely unstable because of the reliance on lies. Any system that's based on lying and deceit is inherently unstable.'<sup>80</sup> The thought that underpins this view is that lying about US policies (or disguising them in other ways, for example through covert action) is necessitated by the decency of the population, who if confronted with the truth would resist those policies. And elsewhere, in arguing (correctly, we believe) against the familiar 'expert' view that the American public has recently shifted profoundly to the right on social and foreign-policy questions, he notes the continuing dissent of the population from many of the more brutal aspects of recent US policy, 'despite all the brainwashing and indoctrination and so on'.<sup>81</sup> Here again, such resilient decency, and the threat it poses to indecent institutions and policies, derive from our moral nature and our fundamental aspiration to freedom.

More broadly, Chomsky rejects the currently fashionable neo-Nietzschean view that the history of the world is *merely* a history of change, in which old forms of domination are simply replaced by new ones, without significant progress in meeting such fundamental human interests as the interest in freedom.<sup>82</sup> A 'child of the Enlightenment',<sup>83</sup> he finds instead that human history, at least at some moments, exhibits 'detectable progress in the guarantee of fundamental human rights, difficult as it may be to pronounce such words in the century that has given us Hitler and Stalin, agonizingly slow as the

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<sup>79</sup> *Language and Politics*, p. 469.

<sup>80</sup> 'Interview', p. 49.

<sup>81</sup> *Language and Politics*, p. 735; *Detering Democracy*, p. 173.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Chomsky's summary of his disagreements with Foucault, in *Language and Responsibility*, p. 80.

<sup>83</sup> *Language and Politics*, p. 773.

process may be.'<sup>84</sup> Such progress reflects 'continual efforts to overcome authoritarian structures and to expand the domain of freedom.' And those efforts, in turn, 'probably (reflect) instinctual patterns that are just part of our moral nature.'<sup>85</sup>

To us, Chomsky's 'optimistic view'<sup>86</sup> seems highly plausible. As noted earlier, a fundamental human interest in autonomy and capacity for moral judgment appear to have played a significant role in many historical achievements in the cause of human freedom (for example, the abolition of slavery, the extension of religious and political toleration). Despite the murderousness of the twentieth century, such aspirations and capacities have clearly been operative in many of the great political struggles of the recent past—from Third World efforts to break free of colonial bondage, to the civil-rights movement in the US, the worldwide movement for women's liberation, or the revolution against Stalinism in Eastern Europe. And whatever the political doldrums of the present, there is every reason to think they are operative now.

Chomsky has disavowed a 'faith' in any project or tradition, including a faith in reason itself.<sup>87</sup> But his weak evolutionary theory suggests a 'reasonable faith'<sup>88</sup> in human beings that works in support of hope about social advance.<sup>89</sup> While the evidence about people is not decisive, nothing that we know about human nature is inconsistent with the contention that aspirations to freedom and decency are fundamental features of that nature; and nothing that we know about social order defeats the hope that the pursuit of these aspirations will produce significant improvement in human circumstances. The fact that such hopefulness is consistent with the evidence enables children of the Enlightenment to be optimists of the will, without condemning themselves to being irrationalists of the intellect. It is Chomsky's insistence on this point, his commitment to both reason and moral hope, that we take to be his signal contribution to social thought.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Necessary Illusions*, p. 355.

<sup>85</sup> *Language and Politics*, p. 469.

<sup>86</sup> *Language and Problems of Knowledge*, p. 154.

<sup>87</sup> 'Interview', p. 48.

<sup>88</sup> The term comes from Kant, who held that it is reasonable, on moral grounds, to have faith that God exists, that the will is free, and that the soul is immortal. See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Part 1, Book 2.

<sup>89</sup> And, recently, he appears to acknowledge as much. See *Deterring Democracy*, pp. 397–401.

<sup>90</sup> We would like to thank Robin Blackburn, Robert Brenner, Edward Herman, Paul Horwich and Carlos Otero for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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## The Gulf War, Iraq and Western Liberalism

The states of the North Atlantic have, since the days of Palmerston, frequently hoisted the flag of liberalism on their way to war. But rarely since 1945 have the principles of right, law and justice been invoked as strongly as in the call to arms for Desert Storm. The populations of Britain and America were encouraged to believe that half a million troops and one hundred billion dollars were being committed to affirmative action on behalf of the rights of the people of Kuwait and, indeed, to the inauguration of a new global order of justice.

In the first part of this article, I try to untangle the disparate strands that make up this language of rights used by Western leaders to vindicate Desert Storm. I then bring together the principles of evaluation deployed by the liberal current dominant in Britain and the United States today—rights-based individualism—with an analysis of the Gulf conflict. This enables an exploration of the degree to which goals and actions in the war can be

justified in liberal terms, and reveals the severe limitations of a conventional rights-based approach. In the second part, I turn to the 'enemy'—Iraq—in order to examine the evolution of this state, so many of whose people have been killed by the military forces of Britain and the US, and to challenge the most influential, liberal account of the development of modern Iraq and of its Ba'athist regime.

## I Liberalism and the Invasion of Kuwait

Most versions of Anglo-American liberal and natural-rights thinking employ a universalist standard of judgement to evaluate international politics. They repudiate the normative stance of the realists, who insist, in the words of their postwar doyen, Hans Morgenthau, that the national interest is 'the one guiding star, one standard of thought, one rule of action' in such matters.<sup>1</sup> Rights-based liberals readily acknowledge, of course, that much of what states—including their own—actually do bears little relation to the professed ideal. Indeed many would agree that the political culture that shapes the executives of these states is far closer to the norms of Morgenthau than to their own, although they would deplore that fact.

Within this setting, the leaders in both the US and UK sought to mobilize liberal opinion following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait by appealing not simply to national state interests but, above all, to general principles. While some opinion-formers debated the issues in the language of utilitarianism, adopting a universalist welfare criterion for assessing the costs and benefits of alternative policies, the dominant language of public debate was that of rights, justice and law. This discourse was triggered primarily by the use the Bush administration made of UN Security Council resolutions. These were interpreted in an idiom that was in fact metaphorical: the transfer of the discourse that serves the domestic legal system within a liberal-democratic state to the realm of world politics. In the perception of millions, international affairs became a depoliticized process of crime and judicial punishment. This single displacement transformed not only the way people judged the political background to the Gulf war, but above all *how* they perceived it: namely, as a criminal act with juridical consequences. Thus the complex fields of force that constitute global politics were magically transformed into the image of a world enclosed within a constitutional state order, run according to the liberal theory of law. The metaphor passed itself off not as a moral truth but as the explanation of actual events.<sup>2</sup>

Firstly, the sufficient and necessary cause of the US attack on Iraq was presented as the act of a villain: Saddam Hussein, personifying the

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *In Defence of the National Interest*, New York 1952, p. 242

<sup>2</sup> Legal metaphors are, of course, commonly used in political discourse. When a government performs an injustice, we frequently call it a 'crime', but this is not meant literally: we know we are using a metaphor. Thus, to say that the West's policy on Third World debt is 'criminal' because it leads to millions of deaths in the South means it is grossly unjust, politically and morally wrong. We do not use the word literally and order the arrest and execution of Mr Camdessus and the other officials of the IMF and World Bank

Baghdad government. This act 'forced' the US to send half a million troops and its global arsenal in response, just as a domestic crime triggers the standard procedures of police response. The Anglo-American blockade and attack was thus reduced to the status of a depoliticized, purely judicial action, from which any political motives, methods or aims would be expunged, just as they would in the work of a local law-enforcement agency. Desert Storm was to be as much a work of nature as the impersonal, blind justice of the law—or, indeed, as a storm in the desert. Thus the actual course of events was turned on its head: contrary to the judicial logic of the metaphor, the US administration in fact decided it must 'prevail' over Iraq and *therefore* campaigned to criminalize the Saddam Hussein regime. (Just as the US first decided to support the regimes of Israel or Indonesia and *then* ensured the decriminalization of those countries' actions in occupying or annexing.) This process involved anthropomorphizing the Iraqi state and its political-administrative organization into a single person—Saddam Hussein, criminal. And the more his human features were enlarged, the more other men and women in the 'criminal' state were dehumanized. The army of conscripts became the murder weapon, the lives of millions of Iraqis the various limbs and resources of their leader. Hence they were fair game; or else they became collateral, in the sense of standing alongside the criminal—by-standers in the police shoot-out.<sup>3</sup>

This anthropomorphism enabled the weaving of a powerful theme of human-rights abuse into the legalist discourse. The war against Iraq became a campaign against a serial killer and torturer, military action being presented as a mere consequence of the original 'crime', the annexation of Kuwait. Furthermore, the war-making itself could be portrayed not as a tidal wave of political violence, killing tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands—an act unleashing the passions of millions across the globe, and bearing unknown and unpredictable long-term political consequences—but as a technical means of enforcing an end—namely, the rule of law.

As a mobilizing ideology for war, then, this metaphor was a formidable construction: an absolutized 'either/or'—one the monstrous criminal, the other the very embodiment of justice. It provided a thorough integration of theory and practice—cognition, evaluation and necessary action. Indeed, the metaphor was to prove in some respects too efficacious, too powerful, when the war ended with the monster criminal still in place and butchering further victims on a larger scale—Shia rebels in the South and Kurds in the North. However, as an explanatory theory or criterion of judgement the

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<sup>3</sup> The projection of Saddam Hussein as a monstrous criminal could also result in an assumption that the US military was actually being used on behalf of the Iraqi people against its government. The notion that because many Iraqis oppose their government they will therefore condone the killing of 100,000 of their fellow countrymen and the destruction of their social infrastructure lies at the source of the notion that justice demanded that the allies march on Baghdad. Overlooked is the fact that the organized Iraqi opposition (not to speak of the population as a whole) opposed any attack upon Iraq, issuing a statement to this effect at their Damascus meeting of December 1990.

metaphor could not, of course, be taken seriously.<sup>4</sup> World politics is not enclosed within a constitutional state order with a fully fledged legal regime and law-enforcement agency. Legal thought and practice are no doubt a significant element in international affairs (valued especially by small, satisfied powers), but international public law remains rather a half-formed, perhaps only embryonic, force. Indeed, for some of the biggest powers the legal element is often no more than the small change of politics. Furthermore, when powers like the US or UK go to war they do so for reasons of national interest, in pursuit of state objectives. As for the idea that attacking a country is equal to enforcing a law, the greatest of classical liberal rights-based philosophers, Immanuel Kant, long ago taught us that war is inherently anti-law.<sup>5</sup>

Although no one could claim that the legalist metaphor adequately describes reality, some may nevertheless maintain that UN backing for force against Iraq provides a democratic political legitimization for the war (as opposed to a liberal, rights-based justification). After all, has not the Left repeatedly used the authority of the UN's Charter and resolutions to attack the United States and its allies in other conflicts—some still current—such as Nicaragua, East Timor, Israel, South Africa, Grenada, Panama? The fact that none of the five permanent Security Council members vetoed military action against Iraq was certainly of great political significance, but this fact confers not the slightest *democratic* legitimacy upon the subsequent attack. UN Security Council resolutions embody merely a Hobbesian, positivist form of law as the command of the most powerful—namely, the will of the five permanent members who happened to be the victors of 1945 plus a small, circulating collection of other states. Even the 'states' democracy' of the UN General Assembly was not reflected in the crucial resolutions of the Security Council. Indeed the entire thrust of these resolutions, as interpreted by the US and Britain—that there should be no diplomatic negotiations with Iraq—contradicted the overwhelming majority of the General Assembly, who desired a negotiated solution. And in any case, the resolutions did not even legalize the attack in the formal procedural sense; that would have required a positive vote by all five Security Council members, but in fact China abstained. Also the Charter requires parties to a conflict to take steps toward reconciliation—in other words, to negotiate: precisely what the Americans (and the British) resolutely refused to do throughout. And in the name of 'liberating Kuwait' the British and Americans

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<sup>4</sup> Amongst its most vigorous opponents would of course be the realist Right, which dismisses (correctly) the dominance of law in international affairs from the *normative* standpoint of imperialism. They glory in US and Western allied domination of the globe, insisting that nothing, such as the details of this or that legal covenant, should challenge this primary virtue. It is, nevertheless, important that wholesale rejection of the values of the realist Right—directly counterposed, as they are, to those of the Left—does not lead to a denial of the factual truth contained in their current view of the world. For, how could they be out of tune with world political realities when their school of thought has to a great extent been *calling the tune* by way of a dominating presence since World War II in the core executives of the most powerful Western states?

<sup>5</sup> See W.B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War: Kant, Clausewitz, Marx, Engels and Tolstoy*, Cambridge 1978, chapter 2.



interpreted the final UN resolution as legitimizing any and all means—not exactly a liberal juristic maxim.

Thus, any principled political stance on the war-drive against Iraq cannot be based upon acceptance of UN Security Council resolutions, as the embodiment of either judicial or democratic principle. We are required, therefore, to make a political judgement based upon our own understanding and prognosis. Such judgement cannot abdicate before UN decisions.

## Two Traditions of Rights

Liberal theory offers a number of disparate approaches to the evaluation of political events, ranging from the Hegel-inspired liberal idealism of Green, through the historicism of Croce, to utilitarian viewpoints. But one perspective dominates all others at present in the US and, increasingly, in the UK: namely, that of natural-rights, or Kantian deontological theory of rights, based on a universal principle of justice rather than welfare. But this approach in fact conflates two incompatible traditions of *political* thinking on international relations, traditions that share a common source in the discourse of universal rights: one, the old natural-rights tradition, which predates liberalism, not to mention democracy, and has its source in mediaeval debates and its highest expression in the international-relations theory of Grotius; and two, the modern tradition of Kantian liberalism. I will briefly examine these in turn.

Grotius, a Dutch Protestant writing during the Thirty Years War and just prior to the birth of the modern state system (marked by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648), was confronting the problem of whether, in a hitherto Catholic European system, Protestant prince-domains had a right to exist and to impose their religion upon their subjects. To resolve this problem he insisted that every state should be treated as sovereign in relation to other states, as well as to the Papacy and the Empire. He then argued for a law-governed relation between these sovereign entities. Grotius's thought concerning domestic politics was, like most strong rights-theorists of the day, trenchantly authoritarian, insisting upon the absolute power of the state over its citizens. He defined liberty as dominion in material things and argued that man has a natural right to punish wrongs, especially wrongs against liberty (that is, property), but that this right of punishment be transferred to the state. Grotius also transferred the notion of liberty-as-property to the state in international affairs, viewing the character of state boundaries as that of a private estate. Grotius was also the founder of the modern idea of a rights-based legal system. His *Introduction to the Jurisprudence of Holland* (1620) was the first construction of a legal system based upon a conception of rights. And his later *De Jure Belli* laid the foundation stone of modern theories of 'just war'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> On the history of natural-rights theories and the place of Grotius within their development, see R. Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories*, Cambridge 1979. On Grotius's role within the history of international-relations theory, see F. Parkinson, *The Philosophy of International Relations*, London 1977.

The Grotian view of inter-state politics may be hundreds of years old, but it nevertheless remains the official doctrine of the international state system today, thanks to its implementation after the Treaty of Westphalia and to the way in which the intra-European principle was extended across the globe through imperial expansion. The doctrine invests sovereign states with legitimate power within the international system and grants each state the right to total (negative) freedom to do what it desires, provided only that it does not infringe upon the freedoms of other states to do likewise. States are thus the only morally relevant actors in world politics. It follows that a world political order in which each state's sovereignty is respected is a basically just order. The US and the UK officially subscribe to this doctrine (while unofficially frequently flouting it—the recent US adventures in Grenada and Panama serving as examples) although it should also be said that the concept of a 'super-power' tends to grant the US additional rights commensurate with its extra 'responsibilities'. The world's diplomatic fraternity has a strong professional interest in the continued vitality of this approach.

The doctrine, then, gives rise to the conventional theory of a 'just war'. War is just under the following conditions: first, when it is launched by a legitimate body—namely a state; secondly, when that state has a just cause, and overwhelmingly this means that the state concerned is defending the principle of its territorial integrity (in Grotian terms, its property) against aggression; thirdly, when the state has 'right intentions'—in other words, when it is not using one violation of sovereignty in order to perpetrate another; and finally, to be just, a war requires the use of 'correct means'.<sup>7</sup>

What I have called the 'legalist metaphor' draws much of its power from this Grotian official doctrine of the inviolability of states: from a crime-and-punishment view of their relations, and from their collective right to exclusive possession of the field of international relations.

The predominant liberal school of thought today, at least in the Anglo-American world, derives from Kant.<sup>8</sup> Yet Kant's thought on international relations was constructed in sharp polemic against Grotian ideas. Kant questioned the Grotian ethical basis of international law since it could be used to justify acts by states which had at best a dubious moral foundation. He pointed out that no government had ever been persuaded to refrain from an action on account of some rule of international law banning it. And, in the words of Parkinson, 'Kant was particularly hard on those who considered . . . the doctrine of "just war" had any bearing on the maintenance of peace or on the improvement of international relations generally.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For an account of this theory, see Telford Taylor, 'Just and Unjust Wars', in M.M. Warkin, ed., *War, Morality and the Military Professions*, Boulder 1979, pp. 245–58. As Michael Walzer points out, Marx, in his First and Second Addresses of the International on the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, uses the language of states' rights and legalism. But these addresses cannot, of course, be used as the basis for an exposition of Marxist theory on war. Marx was acting as the secretary of an International the leaders of which in the UK were trade unionists who by no means accepted Marxist theory—a fact Walzer fails to mention. See M. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, London 1978, pp. 64–6.

<sup>8</sup> Particularly visible in the journal *Philosophy and Public Affairs*.

<sup>9</sup> Parkinson, p. 69.

Modern Kantians give overriding priority not to the rights of states but to the rights of individuals. They formally single out one key instance of good, accord it absolute primacy, investigate whether it is violated, and prescriptively work for its restitution, repudiating the notion that this priority right may be sacrificed for the greater welfare of all. The good in question is usually that of individual freedom, on the grounds that if individuals have freedom they possess the means of achieving all other goods. The task of political analysis and action is to work out the least costly means for restoring this overriding right to freedom. But this, it must be stressed, is freedom for individuals and not for the fictitious legal persons known as states.<sup>20</sup>

There is, of course, a basis from which liberals may derive rights for states—namely, through the collective rights of nations to self-determination. But we should note that some are uneasy about such collective rights, and especially about their derivation from the notion of a collective democratic will. For the right to self-determination is, in reality, a democratic rather than a liberal-individualist right. My aim here is not to explore all the nuances of this Kantian rights-based liberalism, but to apply its main principle to the Gulf crisis.

### The Invasion and Annexation of Kuwait

The invasion of Kuwait on 2 August was carried out with very little military resistance or bloodshed. Initially the Iraqi government said it would begin withdrawing from Kuwait on 5 August, while demanding negotiations. It then remained, set up a provisional government, and altered course; after the imposition of a military blockade through a UN resolution, Iraq formally annexed Kuwait as its nineteenth province.

The occupation of the country by force was accompanied by considerable repression and suffering, by no means only among the minority of the population holding Kuwaiti citizenship. There occurred first the rounding up and transportation to Iraqi prison camps of thousands of soldiers and police (estimates vary between seven and thirty thousand). In addition, many thousands of foreign workers were deported and detained in Iraq. Then there was the use of torture against, and on occasions the killing of, those suspected of having engaged in acts of armed resistance. In its report of 19 December

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<sup>20</sup> This is the view held most clearly by those we may describe as 'global Rawlsians', like Pogge. But it is strikingly not the view held by the greatest reviver of Kantian liberalism in the contemporary Anglo-Saxon world, John Rawls himself. Rawls's entire theory, for all its seeming universalist generality, is, in fact, a theory premised upon the justice of existing international relations and to be applied only within an existing state. As Brian Barry points out 'Rawls does have a brief discussion of international relations, which he conceives in the spirit of a pure 19th century liberal like Gladstone, not even making concessions to 20th century ideas to the extent of catching up with Woodrow Wilson.' (B. Barry, *The Liberal Theory of Justice*, Oxford 1973, p. 130.) Thus Rawls makes concessions to states' rights theory and even to the legalist metaphor, writing, 'The basic principle of the law of nations is a principle of equality. Independent peoples organised as states have certain fundamental equal rights. This principle is analogous to the equal rights of citizens in a constitutional regime' J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Oxford 1972, p. 378.

1990, Amnesty International estimated these killings in the hundreds.<sup>21</sup> In addition, some 300,000 Kuwaitis—a majority of the country's citizens—felt impelled to flee or to remain outside the country, along with large numbers of other permanent residents. It is not clear to what degree this exodus was caused by fear of the Iraqis or by fear of an American attack. Kuwaitis leaving would have suffered a significant drop in living standards, despite receiving money from the government in exile. Average income in the country before the invasion was higher than that in the United States, with a standard of living considerably better than that of the American middle classes, many citizens employing servants and often not having to work.

Condemnation of Iraqi aggression, variously expressed, was issued worldwide. This opposition to the invasion and annexation in the main conflated two quite different principles: the violation of states' rights and the violation of people's rights. Within a Grotian, states' rights perspective, annexation involved what we might call the killing of a sovereign state—the greatest injustice that could be committed within the terms of states' rights theory, and an act of state murder unprecedented in postwar history. Kuwait, a fully-fledged member of the United Nations, was, effectively, liquidated. If states' rights are sacrosanct, this was a uniquely heinous crime.

There is no need to examine the factual details of the Gulf crisis in order to justify Desert Storm within the terms of states' rights doctrine. Iraq gave just cause. What is more, the attack on Iraq was launched by an alliance of legitimate state authorities, (backed by UN Security Council resolutions—a fact with no bearing on this theory's guiding principles). The motives of the US-led coalition were 'right' provided we accept—as we should—the temporary character of the occupation of southern Iraq by coalition troops; only the introduction of US troops into Iraqi Kurdistan without the prior authorization of the Iraqi government raises a doubt over US intentions. The Bush administration's refusal to march on Baghdad or to assist militarily the uprisings in the South or in Kurdistan is a plus, not a minus, in terms of the principles of states' rights. Finally, there is the question of 'correct means'. If such means are governed by international conventions embodying the rules of war, they pose few problems of justification to the US—extending even to the use of napalm or the bombing of civilian targets if such could be shown to be deliberate policy decisions by the authorities. Those who object to the use of certain means by the US usually do so on the basis of principles other than those of states' rights—for example, human rights or human-welfare principles.

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<sup>21</sup> See the *Amnesty Report 'Iraq/Kuwait'*, December 1990. It was impossible to verify such figures: the Iraqi government sealed off Kuwait from Western journalists on the grounds of military security in the face of an imminent allied attack. Thus Amnesty relied upon testimony from people who had left Kuwait. This led to inaccuracies, notably the allegation that the Iraqis had deliberately killed hundreds of babies by removing their incubators. This story, repeatedly used by President Bush to justify war preparations, turned out to be false—it was supplied by an agent of the al-Sabah regime, the previous rulers of Kuwait.

It is nevertheless the case that states' rights doctrine and its 'just war' corollary have no basis in liberal or democratic theory. Nothing in liberal, democratic or socialist political philosophy gives primacy to state power or state rights as such. These philosophies are, in fact, quite prepared to countenance the disappearance of this or that state, including its violent overthrow and the redrawing of territorial boundaries. Moreover, states have rarely acquired their supposedly sovereign rights and powers by democratic means. They have usually gained them through recognition by other states and the granting of a seat at the United Nations—a mechanism not necessarily tied to the assertion of democratic political principle. Indeed, a large proportion of existing, legitimate states assumed their form and rights through the direct impact of imperialism upon their region and subsequent recognition by the dominant imperial powers of the day. Iraq is a case in point, and so is Kuwait. The peoples' rights and will in both cases played no part, quite the contrary. In the case of Kuwait, sovereignty was achieved, above all, due to the strength of British military power and political influence throughout the period up to 1961 when international recognition was granted. Such recognition of state sovereignty is, in theory, a matter of international law, settled not by simple force but by legal title to territory. As it happens, Iraq had a very strong claim, in legal terms, to the territory of Kuwait.<sup>2</sup> But such claims are far from being decisive for liberal democrats or socialists.

It is significant that rights-based liberalism does not, in fact, speak with one voice on the key question of Iraq's denial of rights in Kuwait, although there is a common stress on the infringement of individual liberties by the Iraqi armed forces and police. (According to Amnesty's findings this infringement applied particularly to the imprisonment of former members of the Kuwaiti security forces and to the savage repression against suspected armed resisters or spies, with no respect accorded to the due process of law. Expressions of civic resistance—such as the refusal to use Iraqi number plates on cars—were also punished. Kuwaitis fleeing invariably suffered, though their welfare was probably not greatly affected. On the other hand, the sufferings of the fleeing or deported non-Kuwaiti settled population were often considerable.) But what about the injustice of the annexation itself? This did not actually involve a loss of civic and political rights for the majority because, being debarred from holding citizenship, they had no such rights under the al-Sabah regime. Yet it did mean loss of statehood for the minority with Kuwaiti citizenship. Many strands of individualist liberalism would be suspicious of any

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<sup>2</sup> Iraq's legal claim to Kuwait derived from the territory's integration into the province of Basra under the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans never recognized British 'protection' of Kuwait and neither did the Iraqi monarchy set up by the British after the dismemberment of the Empire (The British, incidentally, threatened to take the whole of Basra province out of Iraq unless the Iraqi government approved the treaty ensuring effective British control over Iraq, as Hanna Barakat explains in *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq. A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists and Free Officers*, Princeton 1978, p. 189. The British also threatened to take the Kurdish area and Mosul out of Iraq unless King Faisal granted Britain control of the oil there.) In 1938 the Kuwaiti Legislative Council unanimously approved a request for Kuwait's reintegration with Iraq, in the following year the British suppressed an armed uprising which had this as its objective

collective claims to statehood—true, say, of the Isaiah Berlin of *Two Concepts of Liberty*, and also of the Bertrand Russell of *Political Ideals*.<sup>13</sup> And a Wilsonian notion of national rights for all ethnic groups entails serious difficulties due to the problem of Arab national identity. Mill, on the other hand, did strongly defend national self-determination on the grounds of the right to political participation.<sup>14</sup>

The decisive principle for most liberal democrats here is, surely, not a liberal principle of justice or freedom but a democratic one: that of popular self-determination. The people of Kuwait were brutally and flagrantly denied the right to decide for themselves whether they wished to be integrated into Iraq. None of the Iraqi government's subsequent justifications for the annexation can override this fact. That the people of Kuwait had been living under an autocracy has no bearing on the matter. Thus on democratic principles alone the Iraqi government should have been opposed. But democratic principle, at least on Mill's grounds of political participation, requires respect for the rights of all the settled population of Kuwait, not just the minority granted citizenship (34 per cent) or the tiny proportion with voting rights under the al-Sabahs (some 7 per cent)—that is, before the abolition of such rights in the 1980s. If the Iraqis had organized a genuinely free referendum of all the people, and this had produced a vote in favour of fusion with Iraq, the attitude of liberal democrats might have been very different. But they did no such thing, and there is every reason to suppose that the great bulk of the settled population would, in any case, have voted against annexation. The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait therefore had to be opposed as a matter of political principle by both liberal democrats and socialists. The question then became a programmatic one: how to end the occupation, and what positive aims to advance in the struggle for self-determination. But this last goal, as we have seen, has a special twist because of Kuwait's unique character: the fact that the majority is denied any civil recognition. It must surely include what we take for granted in other cases of self-determination: namely, the right of all its settled residents to full citizenship.

A rights-based liberalism, privileging individual freedom, tends to underplay other critical political issues raised by the invasion. One of these was who should control and who should benefit from Gulf oil. This was central not only for Western policy-makers but also, of course, in the politics of the Arab world, and for liberal social egalitarians

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<sup>13</sup> See V. Held, S. Morgenbesser and Thomas Nagel, eds., *Philosophy, Morality and International Affairs*, Oxford 1974. This collection, evidently designed to present the authoritative liberal view on key issues, as interpreted by the editors of *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, includes an article on this topic: 'The Principle of National Self-Determination' by S. French and A. Gutman.

<sup>14</sup> The overwhelmingly dominant form of national consciousness in the Arab world throughout the twentieth century has been that of pan-Arab nationalism. The existence of an Arab nation was a belief shared by a spectrum of opinion stretching from King Faisal of Iraq to the Communist International throughout the 1920s and it included the Arabists in the British Foreign Office. However, the British concern for oil and for geopolitical security (the route to India) led them to an almost unique policy in the Gulf region, namely establishing or fostering states based upon tribal-dynastic identities. Kuwait under the al-Sabahs is a case in point.

and the socialist Left. Hundreds of billions of dollars worth of oil revenue was channelled by the Kuwaiti ruling families into Western investment—generating substantial profits, particularly in the UK and the USA. This income could have been used directly for economic development in the Arab world, to transform the lives of people in Amman, Damascus, the Nile Delta and, of course, Iraq.

Another issue, closely linked to the oil factor, was the social structure of Kuwait: that it represented, in the words of an authoritative study of the region, a form of 'new slavery' with a 'viciously reactionary character'.<sup>15</sup> Of the capital generated from oil for investment abroad, 90 per cent was concentrated in the hands of eighteen families. The manual work in the state, and much of the managerial and professional work, was carried out by non-Kuwaitis, especially Palestinians who had settled in Kuwait in large numbers since the 1950s. Yet such people, denied citizenship because they lacked a family connection with the territory traceable to the 1920s, were entirely without civic rights, despite forming the majority of the population.

Such issues would have to be traded off in some way against the injustices of the invasion, particularly in the context of evaluating the US-led military attack on Iraq and its consequences.<sup>16</sup> Yet they were mostly ignored in the mainstream public debate on the crisis, although one American senator quoted a remark in the *New York Times* that pithily encapsulated these concerns, dubbing Kuwait 'an oil company with a seat at the United Nations'.<sup>17</sup>

### Achieving Self-Determination

We will now examine the means that were available for ending the occupation of Kuwait against the yardstick of liberal theories of individual rights. The main options were: (1) a negotiated diplomatic solution; (2) popular resistance backed by external moral and material aid; (3) trade and other embargoes; (4) military action. A rights-based approach could, in principle, support any one of these options. But it could support option (4) only if this could be shown to be the sole realistic means for freeing the people of Kuwait. And even then this school would have to be convinced that the instrument chosen for war—the state(s) waging it—would not itself produce new political

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<sup>15</sup> Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, Harmondsworth 1974, pp. 431, 434.

<sup>16</sup> This trade-off would not simply be between socioeconomic rights and civil-political rights, but one between the civil-political rights of the majority of Kuwait's settled population and the minority. Liberalism, particularly in those forms hostile to the entire notion of collective national will, would surely weigh the civil-political rights of the non-Kuwaiti settled population of Kuwait very heavily. It is interesting to note that the major work of liberal theory of the last two decades, John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, simply does not address the issue of how to define a civil-political community. As Brian Barry observes: 'The odd thing about Rawls's treatment of the question how a particular community is to be defined for the purposes of a theory of Justice is that he does not discuss it... Rawls... may believe that he can dodge the question how the community is to be defined. But it seems to me that this is an arbitrary move which cannot be defended within the theory' Barry, pp. 128–9.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted by Ralph Schoenman, 'Iraq and Kuwait, A History Suppressed', mimeograph, New York, October 1990.

oppression or injustice in place of the old. Utilitarian theorists might very well, on the basis of their factual analysis and prognosis, wish to rule out option (4) on the grounds that military force would inevitably create greater suffering than it would produce any gain for the people of Kuwait. I will assess each option in turn, in terms of both its realism and its consequences.

(1) *A Negotiated Diplomatic Solution*

The doctrine I have called 'states' rights' theory does not necessarily favour the diplomatic solution to ending an occupation because, by investing states with the qualities of persons, this doctrine may favour punishing an aggressor state for 'killing' a 'brother' state, as one punishes a murderer. Such punishment may be retributive, or may be justified on grounds of example or deterrence. But this approach is at variance with all humanist varieties of liberalism, let alone socialism, for it adopts a nihilist, or at least an agnostic, attitude toward the rights and welfare of real human beings, whether as individuals or communities.

For rights-based liberals (and for utilitarians), a negotiated solution must be a preferred means, provided, of course, that such a solution is possible and does not compromise on the issue of principle—complete freedom from occupation for the people of Kuwait. There ~~were~~ negotiations immediately after the invasion; and the Jordanian government, along with the PLO and Algeria, have always insisted that a negotiated end to the occupation of Kuwait acceptable to Iraq was possible. None of these early diplomatic efforts made progress. And it is vital to establish why not. There seem to be two reasons: first, because various Arab governments preferred to see Iraqi power destroyed; second, and crucially, because the United States put enormous pressure upon King Fahd and President Mubarak to prevent any negotiated settlement.

Baghdad then proposed that the UN should tackle the occupation of Kuwait and the Israeli occupations within the same terms of reference. This remarkable proposal corresponds exactly to a rights-based liberal-universalist approach to problems of political justice. It was not suggesting that nothing be done about Kuwait until the Palestinians' right to self-determination was tackled; rather, it was a call to the UN to apply a common principle to both occupations. Yet not only did the US administration bluntly reject the proposal, but it outlawed the idea of diplomatic negotiation altogether, opting instead for total military blockade and subsequent all-out attack. This repudiation of diplomacy demonstrated that the American (and British) policy-making establishment was far from allowing its political operations, following the Iraq invasion, to be governed by liberal, rights-based principles. Iraq repeatedly called for negotiations.<sup>18</sup> The UN Charter requires them. The US utterly ruled out any such diplomacy. The war party in the US and UK denounced negotiations with Iraq as 'appeasement', but this analogy was inappropriate. For the negotiations

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<sup>18</sup> The American rejection involved a classic replacement of political principle with legal metaphor by insisting on the idea that two separate 'cases' were involved.



that produced the Munich Agreement opened Czechoslovakia up for German conquest; it was a case of negotiating for German *expansion*. The negotiations over Kuwait would have been precisely on the terms for Iraqi *withdrawal*.

Some say the Iraqi offer was insincere, but this view is not credible. After all, had the offer been taken up, Baghdad would have pulled off an unparalleled political triumph in the Arab World as the leadership that had achieved a great political victory for the Palestinians—ample compensation for withdrawal from Kuwait. Indeed, it was precisely on these grounds that the US rejected any action on Palestine: Saddam Hussein would gain from it. But this was a price the US should have been prepared to pay, for its failure to support justice for the Palestinians for twenty years. Rights-based liberalism is not governed by considerations of tactical advantage for a given political leadership that adheres to liberal principles of justice. It can be argued that the Iraqi state was rightly denied any gain in political status after its action in Kuwait. It is surely true that the contest for positional goods like status and political prestige in the hierarchy of states is something liberals should deplore. But a principled liberalism concerned with justice for all human beings has no interest in tailoring its policy to the apportionment of such goods or their withdrawal from one state or another. That entire approach is a relic of states' rights thinking.

The view that attacking Iraq would have the salutary effect of deterring future aggression is unconvincing. The most it would do is demonstrate that aggression without US approval does not pay, for we have abundant evidence that aggression or annexation *with* US approval does pay (in the case of the US—Panama, Grenada, and in that of its allies—Morocco, Israel, Indonesia, Turkey and so on).

The Iraqi offer was extremely embarrassing to Washington because the US had been supporting *injustice* for Palestinians. But a principled, rights-based liberalism rejects any relativization of the right to political freedom. That Saddam Hussein had proposed a joint solution to the questions of Kuwaiti and Palestinian oppression should, therefore, have strengthened the case for the Baghdad offer, rather than weakened it.

## (2) *The Resistance Movement*

It might be argued that the US should be condemned for its failure to negotiate, but that, given this failure, we had no choice but to support the blockade and/or all-out attack. This logic assumes the existence of only one kind of force in the world: state military force. But as the Vietnam War demonstrated, this is not the case. Popular-resistance movements are another, potentially very powerful, agency for achieving national freedom. Furthermore, in almost every conceivable instance, this agency is far preferable in ethical terms to the appalling destructiveness of state military force.

The importance, indeed the primacy, of popular-resistance movements for political freedom is given especial emphasis by John Stuart Mill in his article 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention', written in the same year as 'On Liberty'.<sup>19</sup> For Mill, popular resistance to achieve liberation is superior to external military intervention not on the utilitarian ground that the latter may be more costly or may not achieve political freedom, but because a people must 'become free by their own efforts'. In this instance we find that the option of external pressure and support for popular resistance was simply excluded in line with states' rights ideology—which expressly precludes all agencies other than states from having a legitimate role in international politics. There is thus a presumption in favour of state action.

A popular-resistance movement in Kuwait did exist; and it had the support of significant groups within Iraq for a struggle for self-determination. And if, for once, such a movement had been given political/moral support from the West, there is every reason to expect that a powerful political force could have been built. (The Palestinian *intifada* against Israeli occupation is a striking case in point: despite military subjugation, killings, torture, detention without trial, reprisals against civilians, and mass expulsion, the Palestinian resistance, with a population about the size of Kuwait, has become a powerful political force. What is more, it has achieved this in the teeth of permanent ferocious hostility toward the 'terrorist' PLO from the world's most powerful states, but also in the face of majority Israeli hatred of the movement.) The Iraqi opposition rejected both Saddam Hussein's forcible annexation of Kuwait and the bombing and invasion of their country. In March and April they showed that they had considerable forces in Iraq. In the context of a commercial embargo targetted on the Iraqi military and oil industry, this opposition could, in conjunction with Kuwaiti resistance and pressure from the Arab world generally, have greatly increased the negotiating pressure on the Baghdad regime.

However, the Kuwaiti resistance movement would have had to confront two serious obstacles. The first was the social structure of Kuwait under the old al-Sabah regime; the second was Kuwait's oil wealth. The necessities of popular resistance would have forced the movement to call on the people of Kuwait to join a common struggle. This would not have been hard vis-à-vis the Palestinians since they too face occupation, but it would also have required a programme of civil rights and social justice for all the settled residents of Kuwait—an end to the old helotry. The resistance would also have had to advance a blueprint for the future use of Kuwaiti oil revenues. But far from being a problem, this could have been their political trump: the redirecting of oil revenues away from the Anglo-American financial circuits into economic development for the entire Arab region, including Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Syria. This would, of course, have reduced—to put it mildly—the enthusiasm of the Bush and Major

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<sup>19</sup> J.S. Mill, 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention', in J.S. Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions* Volume III, New York 1873, pp. 238–63.

administrations for the resistance, undoubtedly persuading those tied to the al-Sabahs to break with the movement, while the Kuwaiti ruling families retired to their residences abroad; but such a programme would have guaranteed the existing living standards of Kuwaiti citizens. It is clear, however, that this popular-resistance strategy would have been anathema to the US and UK governments, not to speak of the Saudi royal family, threatening to undermine everything the West was seeking to defend in the region.

### (3) *Economic Embargo and Military Blockade*

I have argued that a diplomatic settlement fully satisfying rights-based liberal criteria of justice was perfectly possible. Some, however, may hold that Iraqi offers of a negotiated settlement—immediately after the invasion and then following annexation—were extracted only under the coercive pressure of embargoes and blockade. This may be true. Possession of Kuwaiti oil certainly conferred wealth and power that the Ba'athist regime would have preferred to retain. And even though the regime itself had not engaged in a long internal propaganda campaign, doubtless many Iraqis had long believed that Kuwait should belong to Iraq—thereby adding nationalistic support to the case for annexation. Yet there is no exclusivity of options between embargoes, exploratory negotiations and support for the Kuwaiti popular-resistance movement and Iraqi opposition. But the use of what has come to be known by the blanket term of 'sanctions' requires careful scrutiny.

First, we should note the peculiar terminology. 'Sanctions' in this context simply mean measures to enforce a command: there can be military or non-military types of sanctions. However, within public discourse in Britain during the Gulf crisis a semantic slippage occurred: the word 'sanctions' came to mean all measures short of direct military attack on Iraq—including a full-scale blockade of the country. There was undoubtedly some strategic justification for counterposing 'sanctions' to 'war': the anti-war movement wished to maximize the coalition opposed to military attack, rightly seeing the decisive task as prevention. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on us to examine very carefully the various measures grouped under the heading of 'UN sanctions', and to register the qualitative difference between various embargoes and a military blockade of Iraq.

Two kinds of embargo possessed a powerful rationale: that on oil exports, denying the Iraqi government the possibility of profiting from Kuwaiti oil and facing it with a substantial cost for its continued occupation, and that on arms supplies to Iraq. Arguably there was a strong case for a total embargo on Iraqi exports. But all such measures were different in kind from a full-scale blockade in two key respects. First, the blockade was a form of siege warfare against the civilian population of Iraq and Kuwait. Supplies of food and medicines, specifically excluded from the earlier embargo, were interdicted by the blockade, an escalation that was bound to hurt the civilian population in a country so dependent on trade. And secondly, the blockade involved, and legitimated, the build-up of US military forces for an all-out attack.

And what was the purpose of such a blockade as an instrument of pressure on the Iraqi government? If American demonizing of the Ba'athists was accurate, then this regime was presumably indifferent to the sufferings of its people. Assuming that the regime did seek and require some degree of popular consent—a more realistic assumption—the blockade remained an indiscriminate weapon likely to harm the poor, the elderly and the infirm. As an intervention within Iraqi politics it was likely to draw politically aware Iraqis closer to the regime, which in turn could—and did—attack the blockade as a savage weapon against the most vulnerable people.

#### (4) *The US-Led Attack*

Even according to classical just-war theory the impossibility of other means—popular resistance, embargoes, negotiations—did not produce adequate grounds for an attack on Iraq. Two further conditions were necessary: the attack should confine itself to those means minimally necessary for the liberation of Kuwait; and the 'intentions' of the attackers must not, in turn, entail injustice. The US administration did seek to legitimate its war against Iraq in such terms as the attack was being launched. Of course people were well aware that the American state was launching the war for reasons other than political principle: US interests in the region were directly involved (interests often reduced simply to 'oil'). But many were led to assume that such interests did not conflict with the US military acting as the instrument of justice responsible for administering the minimum force necessary to liberate Kuwait.

Once again, however, we find a tension between states' rights theory and liberal approaches based upon the inviolability of the person. The former requires of good intentions little more than a renunciation of territorial acquisition, while its prohibition on means applies only to the deliberate slaughter of non-combatant civilians. The latter, on the other hand, has great difficulty in squaring its injunction against violation of the person in domestic life with the total relaxation of this injunction in the external military activity of states. No doubt there exist supposed solutions to this problem by anti-consequentialist rights theorists, but such thought is now largely discredited. Rights-based theorists who do recognize the need to take consequences into account must justify the attack by implicating Iraqi conscript soldiers in their government's unjust act of invasion. This seems a difficult argument to sustain, given that the Iraqi soldiers were not volunteer professionals—indeed many risked death trying to evade the draft. (American and British forces, on the other hand, did comprise solely professional soldiers.)<sup>20</sup>

As the war progressed and it became clear that more destruction was being wrought than was necessary for liberating Kuwait, efforts were

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<sup>20</sup> The anti-consequentialist argument—that you should judge an action without regard to its consequences—has been largely discredited among liberal ethical philosophers concerned with public policy. See Robert E. Goodin, *Philosophy and Public Policy*, Chicago 1983. Rawls displays an uncharacteristic irritation in dismissing anti-consequentialism in *A Theory of Justice*.

made by military public-relations personnel to justify this excess by deploying the concept of 'collateral' damage. But in the war's aftermath it was impossible to treat the US war effort as having been governed by the means-rationality of liberating Kuwait: it became clear that the excess destruction was of a qualitative, rather than quantitative, nature. We must remind ourselves of what in sum the military effort against Iraq entailed: (a) A total military blockade. (b) Bombing of the crucial life-support systems for the entire population of Iraq—water and energy supplies, sewage systems—all of which produced what the UN's deputy secretary-general called a 'near apocalyptic catastrophe for the people of Iraq', involving starvation and epidemics of killer diseases. (c) Destruction of the vital irrigation systems on which Iraqi agriculture depends. (d) Bombing of the country's industrial and transportation infrastructure, driving it, effectively, back into a pre-industrial era. (e) Refusal of Baghdad's offer to withdraw from Kuwait, made over a week before the ground war started—an offer welcomed by some European NATO states but discounted by the US. (f) Rejection of the Soviet peace proposal, accepted by the Iraqi government, before the ground war was launched. (g) 'Collateral' damage: the killing of civilians, not only in the Baghdad bunker but in the proximity of bridges and other non-military installations far to the north of the so-called Kuwaiti 'theatre of operations'. (h) Use of weapons of mass destruction in order to achieve wholesale extermination of the Iraqi conscripts in the Kuwaiti theatre: napalm, cluster bombs, and above all the 'fuel-air explosive' dubbed in the US the 'poor man's nuclear weapon'. (i) The 'turkey shoot' at the Matla Pass and prosecution of a war of annihilation against forces that scarcely returned fire. It is simply beyond credibility that 'means' of this sort can be justified within any form of rights-based liberalism as commensurate with the end of freeing Kuwait.

There was also the 'liberation of Kuwait'. Only the narrowest Grotian view, which interpreted 'liberation' as the return of property title to the Emir and his family, could present the defeat of Iraqi forces as a liberation for the people of Kuwait. The rule of the al-Sabahs and some eighteen satellite clans is dependent upon their suppressing democratic, constitutional reform. Kuwaiti oppositionists seeking the return to a constitution far short of Western liberal democracy have been harassed, threatened, and even subjected to assassination attempts. And the liberal-democratic principle of civil rights for non-Kuwaiti residents has been rejected in favour of a regime of terror, torture and killings, directed especially against the Palestinian community. According to the PLO, by mid-March, three weeks after the cease-fire, two hundred and fifty Palestinians had been killed in Kuwait. The New York-based Middle East Watch had by the end of March documented over one thousand cases of torture, forty resulting in death. By late April, US government files recorded three hundred and fifty Palestinians missing—feared dead at the hands of the Kuwaiti government.<sup>21</sup> These actions were overwhelmingly the work

<sup>21</sup> See the article by Robert Block in *The Independent*, 21 March 1991, p. 10, and the articles by Robert Fisk and Robert Block in *The Independent*, 27 April 1991, p. 1. See also Michael Simmons in *The Guardian*, 19 April, p. 11.

of the security forces, with the direct participation of members of the al-Sabah family. An epidemic of rape attacks on non-Kuwaiti women residents has heralded the reimposition of a 'helot state' regime of severe social oppression.<sup>22</sup> And the government announced plans, even before it had returned to Kuwait, for the expulsion of about half a million formerly settled Arab residents of Kuwait, mainly Palestinians.<sup>23</sup> And all this is, of course, combined with the re-establishment of the grossly inequitable circuit of oil capital from Kuwait into the Anglo-American banking systems.

Such were the direct consequences of the US decision to operate through the al-Sababs in Kuwait. Their aim since late August 1990 was not the restoration of the constitutional order, far less political support for democracy, but rather full political backing for this dynastic autocracy. Not a word was spoken by the US administration on behalf of the political rights of non-Kuwaiti residents. What is more, US special forces were initially working with the Kuwaitis in their sweeps through Palestinian districts and were present in police stations while torture was being practised, often, allegedly, quite indiscriminately on young Palestinian men. It was for these ends, then, that the killing and destruction in Iraq was to be justified.

### Liberal Means versus American Goals

I have been prepared so far to go along with the assumption that the American (and British) states may *in principle* have constituted instruments for implementing liberal principle in the Gulf crisis. The predominance of realist moral precepts in the core executives of these states has been noted, as has the evident fact that the administrations were straightforwardly pursuing state interests. Discussion of their behaviour has, nevertheless, been confined to the means of liberating the people of Kuwait and has merely noted how their actions have (repeatedly) departed from preferred liberal norms. But measured against these states' actual conduct in the war this analytical and evaluative framework simply breaks down. It is therefore necessary to re-examine the facts of Desert Storm and try to analyse what its results say about the goals of the US-led operation.

The central puzzle for many has been the combination of two elements: (1) A drive toward war (as opposed to pursuit of a negotiated solution) and subsequently to a crushing military victory, including the wholesale destruction of civilian life-support systems; and maintenance of the blockade (excepting food) after the end of hostilities. (2) The failure of the US to press home its military victory to the occupying of Baghdad and overthrow of the regime or, once the war was over, to support the rebellions in the Shia South and in the Kurdish North. These elements appear inconsistent. the destruction of Iraq

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<sup>22</sup> See *The Observer*, 28 April 1991

<sup>23</sup> The Kuwaiti government has subsequently declared a reduction in the number of Arabs (mainly Palestinians) it will expel. Palestinians have formed a large proportion of the managerial and professional middle classes in Kuwait, in the public as well as the private sector, and they cannot easily be replaced

during the war suggests a drive to topple the regime; behaviour afterwards suggests support for it. The attack on the civilian infrastructure seems gratuitous and aimless. Only through a political analysis of US interests and goals can we make sense of this seeming inconsistency.

United States rejection of a negotiated solution and the option of economic sanctions plus support for the Kuwaiti resistance cannot be deemed an accident. Nor can US dismissal of the Iraqi withdrawal offer and the Soviet peace proposal before the land war began. All were deliberate acts of policy, but with what objectives in mind? One of these can be expressed crudely, and rather misleadingly, as the 'oil factor'—a long-term structural interest; and the other has to do with global factors not directly related to the Gulf or Middle East.

### *The 'Oil Factor'*

Since the late 1970s the US has made explicit its determination to exercise overall influence in the Gulf, laying down the parameters for all political forces in the region through the so-called 'Carter Doctrine'. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, the doctrine's architect, US interests were three-fold: first, guardianship of the oil industry 'with all its political, economic and military ramifications'; second, keeping the USSR out; and third, protecting 'the moderate states in the region, which could be toppled by local upheavals, as happened with Khomeini's ascendancy in Iran'. This latter threat is 'perhaps the most elusive, and yet potentially the most dangerous' to US interests, whether the attack 'be from the left or from Islamic fundamentalism . . . As the Iranian revolution graphically demonstrated, it is very difficult for Western policy-makers to develop an effective response once new and powerful social, religious and political attitudes gain widespread acceptance, the hold of a leader or government begins to slip, and a crisis erupts.'<sup>24</sup> These three interests form a hierarchy of US concerns: at the apex is 'oil'; from this derives the commitment to the 'moderate' regimes and to excluding the USSR.

Viewed as a purely commercial matter, oil interests could fit easily with the liberal objective of removing Iraq from Kuwait (thereby ensuring that Iraq did not control too high a percentage of supply and thus carry too much weight in the oil market). However, one might wonder why a simple shift of ownership would provoke the US into sending half a million troops against Iraq: after all, sellers of oil need buyers, and the long-term price of Middle East oil is dictated by the price of substitutes, and thus has a limited range of fluctuation.<sup>25</sup> But control of Middle East oil is vital for the Americans in two other

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<sup>24</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'After the Carter Doctrine' Geostrategic Stakes and Turbulent Crosscurrents in the Gulf', in H.R. Sindelar and J.B. Peterson, eds, *Crosscurrents in the Gulf Arab, Regional and Global Interests*, London 1988, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>25</sup> This is not to deny the importance of such fluctuations for domestic macro-economic management in Western Europe or Japan. And any power able to control such fluctuations can exert a significant influence on, for example, attempts to harmonize economic policies among the members of the EC in preparing the way towards monetary union in Western Europe. This control thus gives political leverage over other governments.

respects: first, the double economic value of oil revenues, and second, the importance of oil control for US global political power.

Gulf oil provides a very large international market for important sectors of advanced capitalist industry (construction, engineering, military equipment and so forth) and this is overwhelmingly a *state* market, since the revenues are in the hands of the ruling dynasties. Therefore the power that exercises a dominant *political* influence upon the sheikhdoms in effect governs the market. Secondly, oil revenues become great lakes of rentier capital, the flow of which, influenced critically by political factors, is vital for the entire structure of global finance-capital and banking interests. And thirdly, oil money talks politics directly, through the uses to which it is put. This is the case, for instance, right across the world—especially the Islamic world—with Saudi money, which cements regime after regime, from Pakistan to Morocco. And the passages of that money are ultimately controlled by the power which defends the Saudis—the USA.

If the regime of Saddam Hussein had controlled the flow of much of that oil capital, dozens of countries around the world would have had a simple choice between two world politico-economic authorities: on one side, the IMF–World Bank, the ‘official’, American-controlled institution governing the world economy; on the other side, Baghdad, the undoubtedly unofficial but equally efficacious centre for capital and loans. And would this investment capital have flowed as readily through the American banking system and the City of London? Who can tell? One certainty is that political financing by a Ba’athist regime would not coincide with the funding of Islamic theocratic or dynastic currents. The same factors would apply to the Iraqi-controlled market for Western industrial products. Directly threatening to US interests in such a scenario would be the impact on the dollar; for Saddam Hussein might have preferred to denominate his capital in Deutsche marks or yen. As the world’s biggest debtor, with its debt denominated in dollars, the US economy would clearly be vulnerable if a significant proportion of Middle East oil revenues were switched to another currency. For the United States to concede such political power to Saddam was unthinkable.

And finally, the control of oil supplies to both Japan and the countries of Western Europe has always served the US as a crucial political lever in relations with these states. They are, after all, more reliant upon Middle East oil than is the United States, and would undoubtedly increase their independence if their sources were not under the latter’s ‘protection’ but under that of a regime not itself dependent on the US.

These oil factors—the revenue market, capital, and control of the ‘allies’ supplies—make direct political suzerainty over the region by the United States essential. To shore up its own political position in the Gulf and that of its client regimes like the Saudis it was necessary for the US to demonstrate its supremacy over Iraq, to repudiate all diplomatic discussions and negotiations, to ban Arab or West European regimes from resolving the crisis peacefully, and finally to dictate to Baghdad: either climb down humiliatingly before your own



population and the Arab world or we will crush you. A negotiated end to the Iraqi occupation would have suggested US weakness.

The features of the Iraqi state that threatened US dominance were quite different from those stressed by liberals—the dictatorship, the cult, the repression, torture and killing of oppositionists, the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds in Halabja in 1988. The threat lay primarily in the fact that it was not a socially weak and subaltern dictatorship tied to the West through the nature of its ruling class, as was the case with both the Shah and the Saudis, and indeed the Egyptians. The rentier/comprador character of such dictatorships and the social gulf between them and their lower middle classes makes them easily controllable by the West. Ba'athist Iraq, with its ferocious disciplines over the governing elite itself, was different: it sought to base its power on the capacity to mobilize politically its domestic population behind transformative goals, unlike any other regime in the Fertile Crescent. It was not, therefore, dependent on Western powers to maintain its internal security.

The regime's mobilizing capacities were demonstrated after the invasion of Kuwait. Saddam Hussein was not especially popular as an Arab leader, but Baghdad's post-occupation calls for social justice against the reactionary sheikhdoms and plutocrats of the Gulf evoked a powerful response. A Professor at the American University in Washington D.C. who toured the Middle East after the invasion of Kuwait reports that Iraq raised 'the class question, the "haves" and "have nots" . . . on a pan-Arab level as it never has been raised before . . . [Saddam] managed to tap into tremendous resentment, and this has immense medium and long-term implications. The national question remains to the fore, but the connection with the class question has been made . . . [E]ven the press financed and controlled by the oil states in the region and in Europe [covered] the fabulous oil-wealth of individuals; tales of corruption, gambling and squandering. The corresponding impression is that even if corruption does occur on some scale in Iraq, the surplus has largely been plowed into the country for its development.'<sup>26</sup> Not that the Ba'athist regime was seeking to stimulate popular movements to overthrow the sheikhdoms. But it was threatening to pull these regimes within its regional sphere of influence as a means of insuring them against subversion from below; none of these ruling groups, including the Saudis, can feel safe in their own societies without an outside protector. Saddam Hussein could no doubt have lived quite happily with the sheikhs and even the Saudis in place, but only on his terms—a potential challenge to the established role of the US. It therefore follows that a crushing US military victory over Iraq, with no concession to negotiation, was intended to demonstrate unequivocally to all groups in the region who ultimately controlled their destiny and who did not.

#### *US Global Power Interests*

This does not explain, however, why the US administration repudiated

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<sup>26</sup> See the interview with Samih Farsoun in *Middle East Report*, no. 168, January–February 1991, pp 5–6

both the offer to withdraw from Kuwait ten days before the ground war started and the subsequent Soviet peace plan, in favour of bombing Iraqi forces in the Kuwait theatre and a ground campaign—a response in no way demanded by the interests set out above. To understand US aims we must, then, appreciate a further factor fueling the Bush administration's desire for a crushing military victory: the need for a 'demonstration war'. Let us note two repeated themes of President Bush: the New World Order and the Vietnam syndrome. Both signalled global motivations for the war. And as far as the Vietnam syndrome was concerned, the US had to demonstrate that it was no longer just a nuclear super-state with feet of clay when it came to fighting a conventional war against an enemy in the South. It had to show the will and the military capacity *on the ground as well as in the air* to prevail against a substantial conventional force. But to achieve this the US needed to effect by air the liquidation of Iraqi forces in and around Kuwait, in order to make the ground war safe for a largely unblooded US army, rebuilt since the Vietnam debacle. The outcome, a triumph for all wings of US conventional forces, was to make America's main power asset, its military capacity, once again central to world politics.

The features of the Iraqi regime described above also partly explain why so much military effort was directed towards the destruction of civilian life-support systems. To understand this strategy fully it is necessary to consider the intended political consequences: namely, to make the Iraqi regime that emerged from the war utterly dependent upon the US without the need for military occupation. The success of this policy is already apparent. Throughout Iraq people are now suffering malnutrition, starvation and various epidemics, including cholera. To deal with the most serious and urgent damage to its infrastructure the Iraqi government needs equipment it does not possess. It is unable to export and it lacks funds to purchase even necessary food imports. In short, the only sphere in which it is not severely crippled is that of internal military security. This dependence on a largely American-controlled external environment would not have occurred without the destruction of the framework of civilian life. What, then, are the objectives of this subordination to American power?

One purpose is spelt out in the allied peace terms: the destruction of Iraq's capacity to strike at Israel. But a second is to destroy the dynamism of the Ba'athist regime and hence the domestic source of its independence from the US, thereby rendering it as beholden to the US as the ruling groups in the Gulf states. The strategy is, in sum, to guarantee the regime's subservience to the US and yet simultaneously to maintain Iraq as a coherent political force in the region. This brings us to what is seemingly the most incoherent aspect of US policy: did it want, during and after the war, to overthrow the Baghdad regime, or to support it?

Much confusion about US policy here derives from a failure to distinguish the Ba'athist regime from its leader. The Bush administration has had one key policy objective: to achieve Saddam's downfall. The official Iraqi and Arab understanding of Desert Storm must be

brought into line with US interests in order to prevent any possible future Nasserization of American action posing a serious challenge to the US in the Arab world. The US desperately needs a leader in Iraq who, while obviously not supporting their action, could declare Saddam Hussein's policy an unjustifiable mistake, and one directly responsible for the attack. Without the removal and discrediting of Saddam by Iraqi elements Arab politics may still polarize around the stance taken on Desert Storm. In addition, the successful management of domestic public opinion in the West requires the disappearance of the 'Monster of Baghdad'.

Yet to destroy the Ba'athist regime with its hundreds of thousands of supporters in the state apparatus and satellite organizations is quite another matter. That would have meant backing the only popularly rooted alternative political force in the Arab part of the country: the Shia opposition grouped within the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution and the Iraqi Communist Party. The US supports neither of these; and since the rebellion in the south of Iraq, which started on the day of the ceasefire, was led by Islamic currents, the US sanctioned its suppression by Iraqi security forces. The reason for this lies, as Brzezinski stressed, in the fact that the American administration perceived Islamic fundamentalism to be a mortal threat to the Saudi regime and therefore to US dominance within Saudi Arabia. This is not a specifically Shia threat; the danger lies, rather, in the fact that the Saudi regime is held in power by its claim to lead and guard Islam. This claim had been seriously undermined before this Gulf crisis by the Iranian example, one whose Islamic credentials are more authentic than the evidently rotten Saudi dynasty, and which is certainly more popular and politically pluralist. The Saudis' acceptance of half a million US troops into their country has shocked the Islamic fundamentalist current in Saudi Arabia to a degree not registered by Western public opinion. An Islamic regime in Baghdad—and one with democratic legitimation in the country, given the majoritarian status of the Shia community—was not an acceptable prospect for the Bush administration. Precisely the same factors had led the US to shun the united Iraqi opposition: Kurdish support for a Shia-led government in Baghdad would have been a disastrous political outcome to the war for American regional interests.

The position in Kurdistan has been more straightforward for Washington since the link between the Kurdish and Shia leaders was broken. The Kurdish nationalists on their own cannot take power in Baghdad. But the stronger their representation within a formally unified Iraqi state, the more dependent the Baghdad regime is on whoever controls the Kurds. There has been a long political association between the US and the Barzani, tribalist wing of the Kurdish movement. The CIA was evidently giving covert support to the Kurdish *peshmarga* forces at the end of the war.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, Saddam Hussein's agreement with the Kurdish leaders, Talabani and Barzani, is a negative development for the US. If the agreement is finalized, it could strengthen the very ruler they wish to topple. The

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<sup>27</sup> See George Joffe, *Marcus Today*, May 1991.

Kurdish leaders have an incentive to make a deal with Saddam unless they are absolutely convinced of a long-term US guarantee of their power position. The question at the time of writing is whether the US is ready to make that commitment, thereby producing a de facto splitting of Iraq, with Kurdistan 'protected' by Turkey and their own military forces (while maintaining the de jure unity of Iraq, Lebanon-style), or whether the Bush administration will draw back in the face of such a dangerous, open-ended commitment.

Not one US political objective bears any positive relation to liberal criteria of justice or freedom. The aim of demonstrating American dominance in the Gulf would be classed as wholly unjust by rights-based theory. The same would apply to the aim of asserting US world leadership through a demonstration war. Protecting Israel against the Arab states and against the Palestinians' claims over annexed and occupied territories cannot be justified. The rhetoric of humanitarianism towards the Kurds bears no relation to American objectives in the north of Iraq; and the linchpin of their political strategy in the region—protecting the Saudi regime—is a goal that necessarily entails the suppression of liberal and democratic rights.

There is only one conclusion to be drawn from this analysis—a very disquieting one for rights-based liberalism. It is that the entire framework within which liberal discourse situates the American attack on Iraq does violence to reality: it subsumes American behaviour under the category of an instrument—albeit one among other possible instruments—of liberal justice following the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Yet American state power has been and is being used to support and to further injustice and continuing oppression in the region. We are thus obliged to adopt a radically different framework for analysing the Gulf crisis from that with which we began: a framework for evaluating the injustices of the Iraqi regime, but also for evaluating those of the far more powerful United States and its allies. Those who present the US war drive as a force for liberal values and a move toward restoration of justice in the Gulf are complicit in the carnage and destruction wrought by Desert Storm to buttress a regional regime of oppression and economic exploitation.

## II Understanding Modern Iraq

Western liberal public opinion has sought to understand the modern Iraqi state through one interpretation above all others: that of Samir al-Khalil in his book *The Republic of Fear* (1989) and in a number of recent articles.<sup>28</sup> Although Khalil's book has been used to legitimize the war against Iraq, it was of course intended for no such purpose, being a serious and important reflection on issues well beyond the fate of Iraq; it is the work of a humane ex-Marxist sickened by his experiences of the Ba'ath and seeking a better future for his people. Articles written in response to recent events show Khalil to have been shocked by the slaughter perpetrated by US-led forces. Nevertheless,

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<sup>28</sup> Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, London 1989; see also his article in the *NYRB*, 11 April 1991 (published in *Liberation*, 18 April 1991).

Khalil's study is deeply rooted in the tradition of classical Anglo-American liberalism.

Khalil organizes his history of modern Iraq around two sociopolitical paradigms: one is the monarchist regime of British times, and the other is 'totalitarian' Ba'athism, described essentially as 'Stalinist' on account of its political structures. This model is combined with another: that of traditionalism versus modernization and modernity. Within this conceptual framework he constructs his pathos-filled equations on modern Iraq: a modernizing monarchy committed to transforming a traditionalist society, but ineffective because opposed to state-forced change; and, subsequently, great social transformation by the Ba'athist regime at the cost of brutal totalitarianism.

In the following analysis of modern Iraq—in part a critique of Khalil's study, of its political and ethical presuppositions and value-judgements—I use a broadly chronological frame. The first section considers the period of monarchical rule: from the British-imposed regime of Faisal I to the revolution of 1958. The second section follows the post-revolutionary narrative from the first decade of military rule, through the early state-building and reformist period of Ba'athist rule in the seventies, to the regime of Saddam Hussein, turning finally to an appraisal of the disastrous war with Iran and the annexation of Kuwait.

### The Monarchy and Imperial Design

Khalil presents a very favourable evaluation of the Hashemite monarchy imposed on Iraq by the British at the start of the 1920s. Faisal, he says, was 'prepared to do virtually anything in the effort to encourage ... [the Iraqis] to change themselves and then society, except to use force.' There is, however, a slippage here: namely, the implication that the monarchy adhered to the liberal principle of restricting the use of force to the protection of individual, or at least traditional, rights, though strictly speaking Khalil only claims an absence of forced *modernization*. Commitment to historical accuracy should have prompted him to add that in fact excessive force was used against the people.<sup>29</sup> Initially, to impose the regime on the people of Mesopotamia the British inflicted 98,000 casualties,<sup>30</sup> gassing and bombing the local resistance into subordination. Although he bore no direct responsibility, Faisal willingly accepted the leadership of a state constructed in this way. Most historians agree that Faisal's regime, imported from Mecca, had no significant constituency of popular support, and that, consequently, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the monarchy was engaged with the British in fighting one revolt after another.

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<sup>29</sup> Khalil, *NYRB*, 11 April 1991. There is actually a further slippage: Khalil's belletristic separation of the person of Faisal I from his political regime, and consequent evasion of a factual account of what Faisal's regime did, in favour of an inquiry into what Faisal's supposed personal inclinations and motives were. But Khalil's readers could not be expected to spot this and would take his remarks to mean that the monarchy as a political regime, deceptively controlled by the British, had a progressive, modernizing project.

<sup>30</sup> Fran Hazelton, 'Iraq to 1963', in *CARDU, Saddam's Iraq: Revolution or Reaction?*, London 1989, p. 3.

Let us take as our source not some leftist anti-imperialist but the conservative, anti-nationalist Elie Kedourie. He writes that 'The North as a whole had to be coerced by the Royal Air Force' into submission,<sup>31</sup> a more or less continuous task: 'Bombing... until the very eve of independence alone subdued them [the Kurds].'<sup>32</sup> In 1931 the Kurdish leader Sheikh Mahmud started another rebellion. The British decided that the Iraqi army itself should tackle this so that it might be 'blooded' before independence. However, their action was unsuccessful, so the RAF had to intervene.<sup>33</sup> This pattern of revolt and bombing was reproduced in the Shia South—one rebellion after another having to be put down during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>34</sup> For his part, Khalil extends his support for the regime past Faisal's death, through the 1930s and beyond. Kedourie records the crushing of protests against military conscription as late as 1936: 'the killing, it seems, was indiscriminate, and old men, women and children were the victims of machine-gunning and bombing from the air'; and a revolt in 1937 over agrarian issues and conscription was 'put down with the help of indiscriminate aerial bombing'.<sup>35</sup> The regime responded to this insurgence by forcibly expelling Shia religious leaders on the grounds that they were Persian.<sup>36</sup> The monarchy also introduced the public hanging of political opponents, the first chosen by Nuri es-Said being the leader of the long-established and popularly based Communist Party. He and others were strung up in a Baghdad square for allegedly continuing political activity while serving a three-year jail sentence. Kedourie summarily characterizes the monarchy as despotic, its record 'full of bloodshed, treason and rapine'; 'however pitiful its end', he remarks, 'we may know that it was implicit in its beginning.'<sup>37</sup> A conclusion that renders Khalil's claim for the virtues of monarchical rule somewhat hollow, to say the least.

Khalil develops his analysis by counterposing the notion of a modernizing British-Hashemite state with that of a very traditional society—a world of ancient Mesopotamian institutions commanding deep popular attachment. Now it is certainly the case that the British brought modern technological culture to Iraq and that the Hashemite regime—to the irritation of the British—spread some modern, pan-Arabic nationalist ideas, particularly through the efforts of people like Husri in education. But to make sense of the respective roles of the British and of the Iraqi monarchy they controlled, it is necessary to go beyond the simplifying contraposition employed by Khalil and to examine each element in some detail.

The thesis that the British represented a dynamic modernizing force fits a general defence of the progressive aspect of British imperialism

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<sup>31</sup> Elie Kedourie, *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies*, London 1970, p. 256.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>33</sup> See the dispatch from Sloan, Baghdad, 11 June 1931, 8908.00/1501, quoted in Kedourie, p. 438.

<sup>34</sup> Kedourie, p. 250.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 237, 238.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

—an argument used, perhaps rightly, with regard to, say, India. Kedourie, for example, greatly admired British imperial administration. Khalil, for his part, extends such admiration to British policy in Iraq, writing: 'The British mandate and the institutions it gave rise to in Iraq, were the agents of a modernisation that did not arise gradually or indigenously as the outcome of a population's own resourcefulness and engagement with the world. The British in Iraq were modernisers more than colonisers, despite acting out of self-interest.'<sup>38</sup> Kedourie's judgement of the British role in Mesopotamia is different: 'When we consider the long experience of Britain in the government of Eastern countries, and set beside it the miserable polity which she bestowed on the populations of Mesopotamia, we are seized with rueful wonder. It is as though India and Egypt had never existed, as though Lord Cornwallis, Munro and Metcalf, John and Henry Lawrence, Milner and Cromer had attempted in vain to bring order, justice and security to the East, as though Burke and Macaulay, Bentham and James Mill had never addressed their intelligence to the problems and prospects of oriental government. We can never cease to marvel how, in the end, all this was discarded... [in] Mesopotamia.'<sup>39</sup> As for Khalil's view that the British-formed elites were agents of modernization, this is not shared by the British themselves after the Second World War. A report from Chancery in Baghdad to the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office on 16 July 1946 declares: '[W]ith the old gang in power this country cannot hope to progress very far.'<sup>40</sup> If by 'modernization' Khalil means economic development, the balance-sheet outside the oil industry, of course, was not impressive. In by far the most important sector, agriculture, the British achieved the remarkable feat of regression: Iraq's productivity declined from 275 kg per acre in 1920 to an average of 238 kg per acre between 1953 and 1958.<sup>41</sup>

To turn now from the activities of the political regime to changes in society under the monarchy, Khalil describes a thoroughly traditional world of inert, ancient institutions—like Merry England before the totalitarian Tudors set to work. But this is a flagrant misrepresentation, at least with regard to the main institutions concerned with the reproduction of daily life and the maintenance of social order. For these were brand new mechanisms—modern structures built on the ruins of Ottoman society.

<sup>38</sup> Khalil, *The Republic of Fear*, p. 174.

<sup>39</sup> Kedourie, p. 262.

<sup>40</sup> FO 371/52315/18 7045, quoted in W.R. Lewis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945–1951: Arab Nationalism, The United States and Post-war Imperialism*, Oxford 1984, p. 309.

<sup>41</sup> M.S. Hasan, 'The Role of Foreign Trade in the Economic Development of Iraq, 1864–1964: A Study in the Growth of a Dependent Economy', in M.A. Cook, ed., *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East from the Rise of Islam to the Present Day*, London 1970, p. 352. And such socioeconomic regression in agriculture did not generate, by way of compensation, a class of urban entrepreneurs. The landlords, who generally lived in the cities enjoying their new wealth, consumed it rather than invested, and as M. Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett explain, they 'played an essentially parasitic role in the economy while bearing down heavily on the peasantry. It is important to stress that these tendencies were the direct result of British policies during the mandate and that, in addition, the policies had been elaborated at the time in order to produce this overall result.' M. Farouk-Sluglett and P. Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, London 1987, p. 33.

Economic and social change under Ottoman rule had been gradually eroding tribal structures. British policy involved a conscious effort to reverse this trend. In the words of the Administration Report of the Revenue Board in Baghdad for the period 22 March to 31 December 1918: 'Settled agriculture and extended civilisation have tended to disintegrate the tribe and to weaken the influence of the Sheikhs. To restore and continue the power of the tribal Sheikhs is not the least interesting of the problems in land administration which the Bagdad wilayet presents.' The solution chosen by the British was to create an almost entirely new social structure by distributing huge estates—the biggest in the Middle East—to tribal heads who demonstrated their political loyalty to London. Thus, at a stroke, a new ruling class of 'government sheikhs' was established. In the words of Major Pulley, reporting to the civil commissioner in Baghdad on 6 August 1920: 'Many of them were small men of no account until we made them powerful and rich.' The Civil Commissioner of that time, Wilson, wrote later: 'The Shaikhs were in most cases directly dependent on the civil administration for the positions they held; realising that their positions entailed corresponding obligations, they co-operated actively with the political officers.'<sup>42</sup> So much, then, for Khalil's image of an organic relationship between the sheikhs and ordinary members of their tribe or peasants; their real organic relationship was with the British.

On the basis of this new landowning class, the British sought to reimpose and strengthen tribal identities and divisions at every level. They set up a new legal system, codified in the Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulation, which remained in place until the revolution of 1958. Also, rather than allow that bugbear of individualist liberalism, the state, to possess tax-levying powers and the responsibility for administration and police, these were transferred—privatized—into the hands of the new ruling class. And to cap it all, mechanisms were established under which the rural masses were tied in semi-serfdom to the estates.<sup>43</sup> To repeat: all this was a new, modern imperial invention. And, as Batatu shows, as the monarchy decayed in the postwar years, it strove to strengthen and further entrench tribal divisions.<sup>44</sup>

Thus we have a complex picture: the creation of *new* foundational institutions of landownership in order to *revive* dying traditional authority relations, resulting in economically and socially regressive consequences, undertaken for thoroughly modern imperialist political purposes—namely, to create a ruling class dependent upon British military power and therefore committed to imperial interests in the

<sup>42</sup> India Office LP & S 10/4722/18/1920/8/6305, quoted in Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, p. 277. For Wilson's views, see Sir A. Wilson, *Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties*, London 1931, p. 96, quoted in Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, p. 277.

<sup>43</sup> FO 371/3406/139231, quoted in Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, p. 276. As the latter explain 'The policy of bolstering the powers of the sheikhs continued throughout the mandate and monarchy periods, and large landownership became the social base of the regime. . . in the provinces of Kut and Amara . . . some of the largest private estates in the Middle East came to be located, mostly created by the stroke of a pen between 1915 and 1925 . . . This process resulted in the formation of enormous private estates' (Ibid., p. 31.) In the country as a whole, eight owners held 855,000 acres—about 107,000 acres per person. In 1958 2,480 individuals owned 55 per cent of all land.

<sup>44</sup> See Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, pp. 73-128.



region.<sup>45</sup> This use of imperial power to effect extensive social engineering for narrow strategic ends is beyond the comprehension of a liberal political theory like that of Khalil, blind as it is to the interrelatedness of state and class interests, and content as it is to reduce complex historical process to a struggle between 'tradition' and 'the modern'.

### Parliamentarism and Coercion

Khalil sees only virtue in the British-imposed parliamentary system in Iraq. Consequently, for him its abolition in 1958 was a lamentable development.<sup>46</sup> Against the charge that parliament was ineffectual, he declares that, on the contrary, 'the Iraqi parliament before 1941 was astonishingly vibrant as a mechanism for drawing out individuals from their communities.'<sup>47</sup> He does not, however, spell out what this vibrant mechanism was. Nevertheless, a British official reported to London in 1928 on exactly how the system worked: the government's provincial governors acted as election agents with the task of drawing up lists of those who had to be elected *and* of those who could do the electing.<sup>48</sup> The Report on the Administration of Iraq for 1928 admitted that elections and representative government were a mockery. Kedourie thus offers the following simple judgement on the vibrant mechanism: '[E]lections to the chamber of deputies and appointments to the senate were an additional weapon in the hands of the government wherewith the better to control the country.'<sup>49</sup>

For Khalil, then, the Kingdom of Iraq was parliamentarism in politics plus traditional *Gemeinschaft* in the village—in short, a world free of the rootlessness and violence of modern mass society. Here is his idyll: 'In King Faisal's time a peasant had his tribe, his religion, his sect, his village, and his allegiance to the sheik whose lands he tilled. His entire world was constructed from these elements.'<sup>50</sup> There is no mention here of oppression, of the fact that the peasants of the great estates were reduced to little more than chattels; the monopoly of coercive force resides a priori with the state. And although the landowners controlled state administration, the subjection of their peasants occurred in the private sphere of civil society and is therefore of no ethical significance to a liberal champion of individual freedom.

It is instructive to counterpose to Khalil's idyll the insight of a British military man, an RAF pilot who was busy contributing in his own way to what Khalil calls the peasant's 'entire world'. In current parlance this pilot 'had a job to do' on those peasant villages. Nevertheless, he

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<sup>45</sup> As to the precise nature of these interests, anti-imperialist authors tend to stress oil; others point to the strategic dangers of leaving Mosul and Kirkuk out of British control. See Marian Kent, *Oil and Empire. British Policy and Mesopotamian Oil 1900–1920*, London 1976, especially ch. 8, and, on the strategic dimension, John Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East. Imperial Policy and the Aftermath of War, 1918–1922*, London 1981, especially ch. 9.

<sup>46</sup> See Khalil, *NYRB*, II April 1991.

<sup>47</sup> Khalil, *The Republic of Fear*, p. 163.

<sup>48</sup> Dispatch by Randolph, 21 May 1928, 8908 03/9, quoted by Kedourie, p. 438.

<sup>49</sup> Kedourie, p. 438; see also Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, pp. 102–4.

<sup>50</sup> Khalil, *NYRB*, II April 1991.

understood a good deal more about the life of ordinary Iraqis under the monarchy than Khalil. He writes of Iraq in the 1930s:

Government is not, as with us, a machine which grinds out laws . . . It enters into the house here. It knows that you have four sons and that one of them is a post office official in Mosul. It knows that you have Turkish leanings, and that, as a natural consequence of such, you are not to be trusted. It knows that you were friends with Hamid Khuluf before his exile, that you are therefore probably sending information to Persia, and that it must on that account consider in a fresh light what you do with your claim for water-rights against Muhamed Derwish . . . It is this grossly personal element in the all-pervading activities of government which evokes from the uneducated people that quality which we are too apt to dismiss as insincerity, but which is, in reality, nothing but the inevitable compromise of any simple man chased by the bogey of insecurity. For an Englishman with a clear conscience there are few occasions when, in facing an acquaintance, he is tempted to express views at variance with his true ones. But the Iraqi before an official, or even another of his own kind, is in doubt. He must propitiate, and speak fair words. His position is unstable. There is no permanence. He knows that the fact as to whether the official has a good or bad opinion of him will affect his private life vitally. He feels the ground shifting beneath his feet. It is the same with the official himself when addressing his superior. He too feels the ground quaking beneath him, feels his confidence welling out. He may be sacked because his enemies have spoken ill of him. There will be no redress for him, no rehabilitation, unless he has influence in high places.<sup>21</sup>

Here, then, was a set-up that lacked the technical sophistication of the later Ba'athist political-police apparatuses, but which had something far more cost-effective: a *social* dictatorship over the mass of Iraqis by a landowning class that directly controlled their entire means of survival, in addition to the government machinery and local administration. This power was 'all-pervasive', even entering their dwellings. And it was a world unregulated by law: where those below had no recourse to legal rule to challenge abuses of power, even in non-political spheres. But the quality of everyday social relationships, including that between rulers and ruled, is nowhere considered by Khalil. What matters to him is that the monarchy displayed lofty liberal values by refusing to intervene on the peasants' behalf by abolishing the great estates. This perspective blinds him to the burning sense of injustice that fuelled the revolt against the landlords and the monarchy in the 1958 revolution.

### Post-Revolutionary Upheaval

Khalil is not a reactionary. Yet there is no escaping his view that the revolution of 1958 was a disaster, or his identification of the source of that disaster: the entry of the mass of Iraqis on to the political stage,

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<sup>21</sup> A.D. MacDonald, *Emperors Exile*, London 1936, pp. 54–6. Kedourie's evocation of the attitude of the Iraqi state under the British towards the population of that country is all too familiar from allied treatment of Iraq today. '[T]hey were the government in its exalted and boundless power, the others were the subjects who must be prostrate in obedience. The texts of proclamations to the tribes in revolt are characteristic and revealing: The government desires to spare you, come therefore with all speed to the offices of the government and offer your obedience, otherwise the government will punish you, and yours will be the responsibility' Kedourie, p. 261.

bursting through the integument of ruling-class power—or, in Khalil's gloss, 'the eruption of the undifferentiated structureless mass into politics'.<sup>32</sup> He declares that 'The parliamentary form of government was the only institutional mechanism that might have provided a countervailing measure to the emergence of the masses as a force.'<sup>33</sup> Thus Khalil betrays what other liberal writers like Kornhauser, using mass-society theory but seeking to remain within a liberal-democratic frame of reference, prefer to obscure: namely, a strong bias against popular democracy and a desire for institutions that will block, fragment and control popular political involvement.<sup>34</sup> When Khalil speaks of the mass being 'structureless' he should name the real controlling structures over the mass of people (as opposed to the parliament in which the people were not involved): the institutions of landlordism, sheikhly control of civil administration, tribalist legal coercion and so forth. Furthermore, he should register the absence of any structures for involving the people in civil life, far less for channelling their energies in the public sphere—no inclusive local government institutions, no legal industrial-relations organizations, no welfare-state or educational facilities, no civic, cultural or leisure centres. The only large inherited civic institution touching the whole population was the army.

What the old regime *had* bequeathed was a confusing set of political identities. Emerging from an artificial (British) construction, it followed that post-revolutionary Iraq was a geopolitical concept to which people felt no attachment or loyalty. Khalil registers this fact but fails to grasp its significance: 'Iraqi nationalism understood as a sense of identity with a territorial entity known as Iraq does not exist.'<sup>35</sup> This touches upon a central problem for liberal political theory: a deeply embedded notion that the liberal state, and thus any sound state, is held together by law rather than by deep *political* identification with the national state as well as structures of social power. The only positive identifications that the British and the monarchy infused into everyday life were loyalties to clan, tribe or sect. The alternatives to this bequest were loyalties to the Arab nation—fostered by the intelligentsia, and later politically expressed by the Ba'ath Party—and commitment to communism, fostered by the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). States that lack popular loyalty find it extremely difficult to institute within themselves political division and opposition. Without loyalty to the whole, such division threatens to destroy the whole, a problem greatly exacerbated when existing loyalties along tribal, ethnic, religious and class lines are as myriad and complex as they were

<sup>32</sup> Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, p. 241.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>34</sup> It is not clear from the book whether Khalil is himself aware of the sources of mass-society theory in the politics of the European counter-revolution against democracy: namely, the writings of Gustav le Bon and of Catholic anti-liberal corporatism from the days of Pio Nono to the clerico-fascists of the 1920s, as well as 'aristocratic liberals' of the counter-revolution such as Ortega y Gasset. Ultimately the sources go back to Burke and de Maistre. A classic contemporary statement of these reactionary positions is to be found in Leonard Shapiro's *Totalitarianism*, which hasn't a good word to say for democracy and sees Nazism as one of its outcomes.

<sup>35</sup> Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, p. 120.

in Iraq. The problem was not that the masses were undifferentiated and amorphous in their loyalties, but quite the reverse.

While the old ruling classes were crippled by the revolution, succeeding military regimes between 1958 and 1968 proved incapable of carrying through the programme of positive social transformation demanded on all sides in the popular movement: namely, thorough-going land reform, nationalization of the oil industry, and planned economic development, with the aim of improving the lot of the mass of people and promoting social justice and egalitarianism.

### Regional Conflicts

The fundamental rifts in the state have been those involving the Kurdish North and the Shia South. Neither problem of political integration was seriously addressed by governments in this period. The Kurdish question involved a combination of ethnic, social and tribal conflicts. The Kurds, comprising 23 per cent of Iraq's population, were split between urban centres and villages spread through mountainous country, very much under the control of landlord tribal chiefs. From this latter sector came the leadership of the Kurdish nationalist movement, headed by Mulla Mustafa Barzani, a powerful landowner. This leadership, threatened by Qassem's land reform at the start of the 1960s, and demanding national autonomy for the Kurds—which Qassem refused—launched an uprising. The regime, supported by the Iraqi Communist Party, sought to crush the uprising militarily, but the war continued throughout the 1960s, with Barzani gaining material support and training from the Shah of Iran and Israel.<sup>36</sup> The other, more modern, nationalist movement, based in the urban centres of Iraqi Kurdistan among the middle classes and intelligentsia, and under the leadership of Talabani, at first refused to support the Barzani revolt. But eventually it did so, while opening links with the Ba'ath Party in the hope of a better deal from Baghdad should the latter overthrow Qassem.<sup>37</sup> (The Ba'athists did gain power for a few months in 1963, but the fighting dragged on until they returned to power in 1968.)

The problems of the rural communities of southern Iraq at the time of the 1958 revolution were principally those of social oppression, poverty and backwardness. But in addition they felt excluded from national public life through the dominance of the Sunnis from the Baghdad region. In 1958 both the Ba'ath Party and the much stronger Communist Party were predominantly Shia in composition, and the latter in particular commanded enormous support among the Shia

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<sup>36</sup> Israel had started supporting the Barzani leadership in the 1950s, training Kurds in sabotage techniques at a base near Ramlekh Rafael Eitan, later Israeli Chief of Staff, even paid a clandestine visit to Barzani's forces in Kurdistan. By the mid 1960s Israel had become one of Barzani's main props. This and other details were revealed by Menachem Begin on the Israeli Home Service, 29 September 1980 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, MB/6537, 1 October 1980, cited in Patrick Seale, *Assad*, London 1988, p. 243).

<sup>37</sup> On this and other aspects of the labyrinthine politics of Kurdistan, written from a position sympathetic to the Iraqi CP and hostile towards the Ba'ath, see Peter Sluglett, 'The Kurds', in CARDEN, *Saddam's Iraq*, London 1989.

population. But the split between the ICP and the Ba'ath over the issue of Arab national unity involved ICP support for the anti-Nasserite Qassem regime; while, for its part, the nationalist Ba'ath sought the overthrow of that regime and participated in bloody repression against ICP attempts to defend it against the 1963 coup. When the Ba'ath revived, it had lost much of its Shia base. Meanwhile the Communist Party—overwhelmingly the major political party in Iraq after the 1958 revolution—split, with the more radical wing attempting a Che Guevara-style guerrilla war against the military governments of Baghdad, centred in the river valleys and marshes of the Shia South.<sup>58</sup> This attempt at insurrection was crushed, and the ICP's strength amongst the Shia was weakened.

Meanwhile, one section of the Shia clerical leadership, alarmed by post-1958 secularism—in particular, the strength of atheistic communism and the declining hold of Islam amongst Shias—sought to reverse the tide by launching a movement of theocratic reaction in the late 1960s, 'al-Dawah' (Islamic Call), a clandestine party aided, after the Ba'ath came to power in 1968, by the Shah of Iran, and oriented towards terror tactics.<sup>59</sup>

Lacking a strong, established bourgeoisie that could control and steer popular aspirations, Iraq's ruling class possessed only the armed forces as an instrument of political integration. But the centrifugal forces within the state threatened the military itself with fragmentation. Such, then, were the compound challenges to any attempt to integrate the state politically after ten years of post-revolutionary turmoil.

Before examining life under the Ba'athist regime that came to power in 1968, we should ponder Elie Kedourie's prognosis following the 1958 revolution: 'Iraq under the monarchy faced two bare alternatives: either the country would have plunged into chaos or its population should become universally the clients and dependents of an omnipotent but capricious and unstable government. To these two alternatives the overthrow of the monarchy has not added a third.'<sup>60</sup> The aim of the Ba'athist leadership was precisely to find that third alternative: to build a modern, stable, politically integrated state.

### Ba'athism in the 1970s: State-Building and Reform

Khalil is not blind to the social transformation achieved by the Ba'ath Party since its seizure of power in 1968. He acknowledges that the regime dramatically modernized Iraqi society, led by its drive against illiteracy and for free education for all—a revolution that produced, according to Khalil himself, one of the best-educated intelligentsias in

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<sup>58</sup> Many of the militants from this wing of the party subsequently joined the Palestinian movement in Jordan, especially the PFLP. On the history of the Iraqi Communist Party, including its roots in the Shia South, see Barakat's monumental work, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*.

<sup>59</sup> See Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War*, London 1989, p. 24. On the ideology of the Shia current, see the very informative article by Hanna Batatu: 'Iraq's Underground Shi'i Movements. Characteristics, Causes and Prospects', *the Middle East Journal*, Autumn 1981.

<sup>60</sup> Kedourie, p. 260.

the Arab world. He also credits the regime with giving women the right to careers and participation in public life; thus by the end of the 1970s women formed '46 per cent of all teachers, 29 per cent of all doctors, 46 per cent of all dentists and 70 per cent of all pharmacists.'<sup>61</sup>

Of even greater importance, however, was the fact that this Ba'athist regime finally carried through the land reform promised by the revolution, utterly transforming the social conditions of the peasantry. It also created a modern welfare state for the urban working classes and poor. And it did what other regimes feared to attempt: it took on the oil companies and nationalized them, turning to the USSR for help. This was not the first nationalization of Arab oil, being preceded by moves in Libya and Algeria, but such action in 1972, before the Yom Kippur war, was still a perilous undertaking, strongly resisted in the West until the French broke ranks. Finally, the government launched an ambitious programme of industrial investment and development.

During the early 1970s the regime made a serious effort to integrate the Kurdish North by offering the most far-reaching settlement any government had proposed to its Kurdish population. The Ba'ath—unlike the Turkish government, for instance—had always recognized the Kurds as a separate nationality. Saddam Hussein proposed a Kurdish autonomous region with its own parliament as well as ministers in Baghdad, recognition of Kurdish as an official language, and Kurdish teaching in schools. Barzani rejected this offer, worried by the renewed push for land reform and, above all, encouraged by the Shah of Iran (who, incidentally, offered no such rights to his own Kurdish population) that he could gain a far better deal by waging war against the Ba'athist government. In 1973, Kissinger, preoccupied by the task of isolating Syria in the peace process, gave further substantial assistance to the Kurds in order to bog down the Baghdad regime in a costly war. The tactic worked, costing the latter two billion dollars a year until Saddam Hussein persuaded the Shah to end this aid in 1975. (One week after the Shah had informed him of this, Barzani offered unconditional surrender and went into exile in the USA where he died.) Of course, the Ba'ath could have easily satisfied the Kurds if it had offered them full self-determination and control of the northern oil fields. But all states in the modern world are extremely grudging and cautious when secession and vital economic interests are at stake.

In the South, the Dawah denounced the Ba'athist government not because it was Sunni-dominated but because it was atheistic, because its leader, Michel Aflaq, was a Christian, and because it was allied with the Communist Party and the USSR.<sup>62</sup> The Dawah fulminated against such issues as the secular Ba'athists' tolerance of alcohol consumption, even in the holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala. The regime hit back with savage repression combined with a major programme of public spending on the Shia shrines and on social development. The policy seems to have had some success until it was seemingly threatened by

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<sup>61</sup> Khalil, *NYRB*, 11 April 1991.

<sup>62</sup> Hiro, p. 24.

the Islamic revolution in Iran.<sup>63</sup> The regime's approach to the difficult relationship between Islam and secularism was a good deal more sophisticated in matters of principle and policy than that of many governments facing similar problems: namely, recognition of the cultural centrality of Islam and of the requirements of religious practice, combined with a resolute defence of the secular framework of public life. At least formally, the regime sought to extend tolerance to the significant Christian minority.

### Controlled Participation and Repression

The leadership worked successfully to subordinate the armed forces to the Ba'ath Party itself, thereby ending the role of the officer corps as the sovereign state authority. Political decision-making was concentrated in the hands of the party and its leadership. Some have viewed the party as merely an empty facade behind which the politics of clan and tribe have prevailed. It is certainly the case that clan fissures are present within the Ba'ath, as indeed they were within the Communist Party; these are partly an expression of the currents that permeate the organization, but testify also to the presence of nepotism and rivalry such as is found in any ruling party. Ultimately such factors must pose a threat to the party's own stability and legitimacy, and are, therefore, a symptom of crisis.

The Ba'athist regime committed itself to the principle of popular sovereignty and to a constitutional, representative state, but declared that the need for a state of emergency made the introduction of such a democracy impossible. It consequently vested supreme authority in a Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) on the basis of a provisional constitution: a body able to rule by decree and veto government decisions. After the civil war with the Kurds in 1975, the government organized elections and established a parliament. But the emergency institutions remained in place, as did the RCC. (We might note that Egypt has also been ruled by decree under a state of emergency more or less continuously since before 1967, though under Sadat and Mubarak Islamic *Sharia* law has also been introduced, unlike in Iraq.) Although the party had thus made certain of retaining its absolute position of power, it had at the same time made efforts to involve other parties. For much of the 1970s, for example, the Communist Party was in the government; at various times the Talabani wing of the Kurdish nationalist movement has been in alliance with the regime.

At the level of institution-building, the Ba'ath created local councils with elected representatives. These proved to be a key instrument, along with the trade unions, for drawing people into public life; another has been the local militias. Yet in these realms, too, the party exercised control, severely restricting their degree of effective political autonomy. This stifling party presence was especially evident in the political police and repressive apparatus, which threw a blanket of surveillance over the entire population. The first task of these organizations was to crush those believed to be working actively to overthrow the regime. Methods have invariably been brutal and victims often

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

murdered. For instance, those Communists who continued the guerilla war in the South after the Ba'ath came to power could not expect to leave prison alive. Since most organizations are permeated with family and clan links, the brutality was often directed at relatives.

The second task of the repressive apparatus is to act as a tool of political coercion against other parties or movements. Thus, while seeking to cajole the Communist Party leaders into a united front and participation in government, the regime would apply pressure by persecuting and sometimes even killing Communist militants at the base of the party. The ICP, legalized by the regime of Saddam Hussein, probably suffered more killings from its hands after 1968 than it had suffered in the decade 1958 to 1968, with the exception of the period immediately after 1963.

### Ba'athism in the 1980s: Saddam Hussein

By the late 1970s, the Ba'ath had a formidable achievement of state-building behind them and had largely stabilized the new institutional structure. As a result of social reforms, egalitarian policies and a thoroughgoing modernizing drive—all helped greatly by the mid-seventies oil-price increases—they felt strong enough to call elections and establish a parliament. We can, therefore, reasonably assume that the party had achieved a degree of popular support despite the absence of free party competition.

The picture, of course, looks very different today; and the rot set in long before the US-led attack of January 1991. What went wrong? The short answer is the Iraq-Iran war, started by the Ba'athist government. As well as inflicting a dreadful toll in human suffering on the Iraqi people, it re-opened the civil war with the Kurdish nationalists and generated a more brutal style of politics—one that resulted, for example, in the Iraqi army's gassing of civilians in Halabja and the slaughter of thousands more Kurds after the war was over. At the end of hostilities the Iraqi state was heavily in debt—a position worsened by the oil-price slump—and the regime prey to the manoeuvres of the Emir of Kuwait. Conditions thus conspired to make Iraq vulnerable to a re-opening of the deep fissures in the state which the Ba'ath had spent the 1970s seeking to close.

It is arguable that the trigger for this disastrous chain of events was the replacement in 1979 of Bakr by Saddam Hussein as president. This move was certainly resisted within the Ba'athist leadership, though nothing is known about the disagreement, and therefore whether or not the appointment represented a policy turn (perhaps doubtful, since experts agree that Saddam Hussein had been the driving force of the regime throughout the 1970s). One negative effect of this change in leadership was the rapid growth of a personality cult. Such cults inevitably alter the decision-making mechanisms of a regime, replacing collective party bodies with the authority of one man, thereby concentrating power in absolute fashion. As a consequence, the regime's policy-making capacities may have been weakened, although Saddam Hussein's very survival suggests a resourcefulness and command that is evidence to the contrary. Notwithstanding



this development, the decision to wage war against Iran was not merely the whim of the president, but appears to have had both party and popular support.<sup>64</sup> In point of fact, the weaknesses in Ba'athism that led directly to the attack on Iran were its nationalist ideology and petty-bourgeois roots, factors present from the start of the regime. During the 1970s they did not cripple its progressive, modernizing project, though nationalism will certainly have helped to prevent a democratic settlement with the Kurds. However, the change in external environment brought about by the Islamic revolution focused new pressures upon the Ba'athist project at its most vulnerable point.

The Ba'ath Party in Iraq, like that in Syria, had its roots neither in the urban capitalist classes nor in the industrial working class, but in the large middle class of intellectuals, state employees, artisans and small merchants—very important strata in the Fertile Crescent. On the whole these groups did not stand in an antagonistic relationship to the working class. For this reason Batatu is fully justified in including the Ba'ath Party along with the Communist Party among the revolutionary forces of modern Iraq. The split between these two groups under Qassem derived, as we saw, from their lack of common ground on the national question. The ICP failed to support the national movement's aspiration for immediate unity with the United Arab Republic embracing Syria and Egypt, and this ensured Ba'athist leadership of the movement. Yet the party's experience during the 1960s told them that a programme simply calling for immediate Arab unity was insufficient, and also that there existed formidable obstacles to achieving a stable unification of the Arab states. The post-1968 party had not abandoned the latter as a long-term aim, but its priority was first to construct a powerful, integrated Iraqi state. This was, above all, the project of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi party's general secretary.

The Ba'athist programme of nationalization, economic development and establishment of a welfare state benefited both workers and the middle class. The scale of accruing oil revenues undoubtedly made a decisive contribution to the success of the modernization programme in education and health. It also helped to sustain a pattern of state-dependent industrial development. The Iraqi state was not portrayed as a means of emancipation for the country's working population, but as the resource and authority best able to construct a strong Iraq, capable of leading the Arab nation. There is nothing unusual, of course, about such statist politics; most of today's imperialist powers went through just such a phase. Nevertheless, in a region like the Gulf, where the world's strongest superpower has important interests, this project was fraught with great risks.

### Response to the Iranian Revolution

In Iran, the Shah's drive to dominate the Gulf had produced a military build-up and growing hostility to Iraq. This had caused the Ba'ath to develop its own military strength in the 1970s, funded by its oil revenues. The subsequent fall of the Shah in the Islamic revolution

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<sup>64</sup> If we accept Phebe Marr's account in her chapter on the Iran–Iraq war in P. Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, Westview 1985.

transformed the political equation in the region and presented the Ba'athist leadership with an irresistible temptation. The centre of that equation had been the protection of American interests in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Iraq, shut out of this security structure, had been on the defensive regionally and impelled to concentrate upon its domestic programmes. The Iranian revolution did not just remove America's regional policeman; it created a state claiming leadership of the Islamic world and therefore posed a mortal threat to the Saudi order. Thus the opportunity arose for the Iraqi regime to become the military linchpin of America's new security system in the Gulf, a role which the social weakness of Saudi Arabia prevented it from playing. There also existed, of course, a powerful domestic incentive for the Ba'athists to intervene militarily in the region: for clearly the Islamic revolution posed a direct threat because of the religious appeal of Shia Iran to the people of southern Iraq. A military victory would serve decisively to bind Iraqi Shias into a common political identity with the rest of Iraq.

The Ba'athist leadership, politically sophisticated and keen to exploit this regional development, could also spot a further set of incentives. By becoming the sword defending the interests of the West in the Gulf, it would escape the pariah status given it during the 1970s, and thereby gain access to the metropolitan centres of Western capitalism: loans, new technologies, investment expertise, training and so forth, as well as entry into the world of legitimate international diplomacy—something solely in the gift of the Atlantic states.

Only one question remained: would it work? The Americans assured Baghdad that it would: that the Iranian armed forces were in chaos and a quick war would present few risks. But this turned out to be nonsense. Eight years of atrocious suffering were the result. By 1982 Saddam Hussein had realized that his plan for a quick victory had been a delusion and he sought to extricate his regime from the war through a negotiated settlement. However, the Iranian government made the removal of Saddam Hussein the precondition for peace, which provoked in turn an ever more brutal Iraqi military response against the more powerful state, including the use of poison gas on front-line Iranian troops. By the time a negotiated peace was in place, in 1988, it was abundantly clear that the decision to attack Iran had been a grave political and military miscalculation. A million people had died, oil wealth had been squandered, and the government had lost control of Kurdistan. Economic recovery and the reconstruction of a damaged and overburdened state and social fabric—not to mention the repair of shattered lives—would make tremendous demands of the Ba'ath, and take many years to effect. And the government could count on few allies within Iraq. Efforts to rebuild links with the ICP were rejected and the regime had no political means of integrating the South effectively. A policy of terror was finally applied to integrate the Kurds. The regime's only asset was a powerful, battle-hardened military machine. Nevertheless, the scale of this modern Iraqi army—very large for the Gulf region—could only be considered a threat by surrounding states, and by their allies. Thus, by the end of the 1980s all the main historical forces both within and outside Iraqi politics were uniting against the Ba'ath. The stage was set for the catastrophe of 1991.

As is usual after a war, the Arab people of Iraq demanded a new and better deal in 1989. The regime did not have the resources to provide such a deal and the al-Sabahs presented an ideal target-cum-solution. Heavily in debt and hard-hit by the oil-price slump, the regime had been victim to the Emir of Kuwait's endeavours against OPEC quota and price decisions. It therefore risked a strike at the al-Sabahs and invaded, undoubtedly hoping that this would be followed by a negotiated way out of its debt problems. When the US blocked such negotiations and demanded a total public capitulation, the regime understood that this could lead to its domestic collapse. It decided to stand, like Nasser in 1956, and defend its dignity as leader of the Arab nation against the enormous military power of the West, no doubt calculating—correctly as it turned out—that the US was still unable to turn to Iran as its surrogate power in the region and thus could not risk the break-up of Iraq.

### Lessons for the Left

I began this section with a polemical engagement with Samir al-Khalil, criticizing in particular the reductive nature of his conceptual framework and the limitations this imposes on his analysis of modern Iraq and the Ba'athist regime—limitations at the heart of the liberal tradition within which he works. I hope subsequently to have shown that Iraq's recent history, bearing directly on the events that led to defeat in two immensely damaging wars that radically changed the geopolitical map of the Gulf region, was an infinitely more complex narrative than Khalil allows. Notwithstanding this criticism, *Republic of Fear* represents an honest and important reflection on Iraqi politics, a reflection unrestricted by narrow strategic concerns and possessing greater insight than the attenuated arguments typical of most liberal commentary on the Gulf crisis. Most significantly of all, Khalil's work addresses questions of great import to the Left.

The central problem is that the Iraqi Ba'ath did carry through a fundamental social transformation, adopting for this purpose an economic programme almost indistinguishable from that of the Marxist Left: namely, radical land reform, nationalization of industry, the encouragement of cooperative farming, and state-led economic development. The Baghdad regime, what is more, stood for a secular public life without taking a negative stance on Islam; it even formally recognized the national identity of the Kurds. Notwithstanding this progressivism, it has also been an extremely repressive regime, using political police as its main instrument of control. It finally imposed on its people a misguided effort to become the imperialist guardian in the Gulf, before leading them into the Kuwait catastrophe. The leaders of the Iraqi Communist Party have responded to this experience by calling the Ba'athist regime 'fascist'. This, however, does little but explain the problems away. For Ba'athism was not a counter-revolution against democracy and the labour movement; it was an alternative to military rule, and in its socioeconomic policies a left-oriented regime with which the official Communist Party cooperated through most of the 1970s.

Khalil, for his part, has responded in another way: he sees the Ba'ath

as the product of a deficient and degraded Arab political culture, and consequently as a totalitarian movement analogous to Stalinism. His solution has been to reject that model in favour of the theoretical culture of Anglo-American Cold War liberalism, and to denounce all goal-oriented activist regimes seeking to transform social conditions. His solution in short is: liberal-democratic constitutionalism now, whatever the social correlates and consequences. But this stance is not acceptable to the Left, entailing as it does a capitulation before social injustice and the evasion of political choice and strategy. It drives Khalil, ultimately, to the belief that American military strength could constitute a liberal *deus ex machina*—a wild illusion.

The Ba'ath came to power as a tiny organized party, by way of a military coup. It sought to sink popular roots through greatly expanding the party, and was acutely aware of the need to extend the base of its political support, reaching out to the ICP for this purpose. But when the extended state of emergency ended in the mid 1970s, the Ba'ath leadership, awash with huge oil profits and aware of its wide popular support, turned increasingly towards a de facto one-party dictatorship, eschewing the need for pluralist institution-building. This was a fatal turn, yet one easy to accomplish, not only because the use of police apparatuses to carve up political space was effortlessly simple, but also because there was no other political model available. This is where Khalil's reference to Stalinism is very much to the point. The party leadership, including Aflaq and Saddam Hussein, were not simply corrupt adventurers. Indeed, they were passionately committed to the Ba'athist cause; they also sought to overcome the failings of the earlier Ba'ath and of Nasser, and were looking for models, not least in Eastern Europe and in Cuba, for a way forward. They found nothing there to urge them against the course of one-party dictatorship. If their middle-class nationalism made the regional imperialist temptation irresistible, the Stalinist experience made their domestic course equally so. Their critique of Nasserism did not extend beyond the need for a powerful hegemonic party. The lesson from Eastern Europe was that a one-party dictatorship was assisted, in its formative phase, by the deployment of political police.

The Left's answer to this Stalinist experience does not consist of pitting society against the state; it involves building popular, pluralistic state institutions with sovereign powers over the executive. The sovereignty of such popular institutions must lie precisely in their pluralism and be underwritten by a ban on political violence as a method of resolving disputes amongst elected parties. This does not preclude the temporary concentration of great powers within the executive, including the right to rule by decree; but it does entail the ultimate subordination of all parties and agencies to the will of the elected assembly.

The political culture of twentieth-century Iraq has been shaped more by British-imperialist social engineering than by the people of that country, excluded for decades from the political system. The Ba'athist project has its derivation more in the political traditions of the North, both in its nationalist and in its socialist values, and has nothing in

common with the political culture of such Arab neighbours as Saudi Arabia or the Emirate of the al-Sabahs. And its critical weaknesses owe far more to the deficiencies of Stalinism and to the external temptations of the American-constructed incentive system in the Gulf than to the supposedly closed discursive universe of some putative organic 'Arab culture'. This latter is, in fact, nothing more than another mythical Western construction useful for explaining away the disastrous, destructive consequences of Anglo-American military intervention in the Arab world—today, as well as yesterday and tomorrow.

### Conclusion

Desert Storm was justified before a liberal-democratic public in the West in the language of rights. However, this discourse is one shared with an older tradition of states' rights theory, the substantive principles of which differ radically from, and indeed are largely antagonistic towards, those of contemporary liberalism. As a consequence, the shared language readily serves to obscure this antagonism and the disparateness of the two traditions. The application of universal rules to cases, abstraction from context and history, the attempt to transform political complexities into juridical questions of crime and punishment—such common modes of thought and representation can translate a domestic liberalism into an ideology for justifying statist militarism abroad. Moreover, the contemporary revival of Kantian political theory, the full development of which has been achieved in the work of Rawls, has not on the whole taken its universalist mission seriously. Liberal justice in the latter's work remains, in a theoretically unconvincing manner, confined within national boundaries, thereby leaving the field of international politics to the Grotians, if not the realists.

In the first part of this article, I attempted to apply the principles of rights-based liberalism to the Gulf crisis by employing the problem-solving approach that has characterized most commentary and discussion in the West. The problem was defined simply: how to end the injustice produced by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. And the issue explored was whether the response—culminating in Desert Storm—could be justified as the instrument of liberal justice. The conclusion reached was that this response was in fact directed toward objectives, and was the expression of interests, that run counter to liberal-democratic principles—at the expense of the Iraqi and Kuwaiti populations. Thus the barbarity of war was the price not of justice but, rather, of defending oppressive regimes and thereby fulfilling imperial design in the Gulf and the wider Arab world.

This judgement calls in question the problem-solving framework with which we began. To establish the invasion of Kuwait as the central problem, and then to subsume the British and American states under the category of possible instruments of justice, is to presume that the social order disrupted by the invasion embodied a minimal principle of justice. Yet no such order did exist prior to the invasion; instead there was oppression and inequity, in which the West—and, above all, the USA—had a primary stake. It is therefore behoven upon any liberal politics that takes its values seriously to identify the Western

powers as the central obstacle to the pursuit of popular interests and democratic goals in the region.

This in turn raises fundamental questions about the international order over which the Western powers preside. Throughout the article I have criticized the normative side of what I have termed 'states' rights' theory. The cognitive aspect of this theory presents us with a world of independent nation-states that are only related externally. Such juridical sovereignty precludes the possibility that some states might penetrate the internal economic and political life of others. This possibility, of what could be called 'states' rights imperialism', would seem a contradiction in terms within the framework of the theory. Nevertheless, for hundreds of millions of people in the South this scenario is all too real: the legal sovereignty of their states sits easily with a situation in which most economic, social, and indeed political, relationships in their daily lives are governed by centres of power—'private' and 'public'—located in the North.<sup>65</sup>

The Iraqi revolution of 1958 was impelled by the aspiration to throw off the yoke of social oppression constructed by the British and their subaltern collaborators early in the twentieth century. And it led to the project of the Ba'ath Party to transform Iraq into a modern, secular, egalitarian and constitutional state. In the decades since the collapse of the European empires this aspiration has been shared by a variety of political movements in the South. The difficulties of attaining these goals do not by any means derive mainly from the characteristics of leaders like Saddam Hussein. More fundamental obstacles include the fissures in the new territorial entities bequeathed by the European powers, the external economic and geopolitical environments designed in the North, the local social structures and comprador regimes they favour, and the absence of tested alternatives to the evidently bankrupt Stalinist model of development. Any critique of the nationalist and authoritarian politics of the Ba'ath should show awareness of these overlapping contexts.

The appeal of liberalism resides, above all, in its emphasis upon the overriding importance of subordinating political power to respect for the person and for the rights of the individual. Yet in so far as it singles out the individual's relation to the state as its primary concern, liberalism can display a double blindness: towards the oppressive relationships governing the real, everyday lives of the majority; and towards the potentially progressive role of popular movements for radical change, of political force and of state action in modernizing and transforming peoples' lives. This blindness is exemplified by the liberal perspective from which Samir al-Khalil observes the history of modern Iraq. And it was exploited to the full by the Western coalition which seized upon the dictatorial form of the Iraqi state in order to represent a drive to secure imperial interests as a struggle between liberal respect for persons and political oppression. The real stakes in Desert Storm were very different, as has become all too evident in its aftermath.

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<sup>65</sup> For an illustration of how these mechanisms operate in relations between the Western powers and Eastern Europe today, see my article in *NLR* 1982, July–August 1990.



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## Domestic Political Incentives for the Gulf War

Why did the United States fight the Gulf War?\* What factors entered into George Bush's decision to avoid a negotiated solution? The timing of that decision goes some way to answering these questions, and two conflicting theories have been offered: first, that Bush wanted war from the beginning, but couldn't make that clear until after the Congressional elections; second, that he did not come down firmly in favour of war until late October, when he decided to double the number of troops and set the timetable for air and ground attacks.<sup>1</sup> Bob Woodward's new book, *The Commanders*, provides important new information about this decision from General Colin L. Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Although Bush publicly declared on 5 August, 'this will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait', his efforts to reverse the invasion focused on UN sanctions and covert CIA operations; it was not until October, according to Woodward, that the president requested a military briefing on 'how to conduct an offensive operation against Saddam's forces'. Late in October, before Bush decided to double US ground forces, Woodward writes, Powell tried to persuade the president that 'containment' of Iraq through economic and military pressures could force Saddam out of Kuwait without war, but that it would take time. Bush, according to Woodward's account, answered, 'I don't think there's time politically for that strategy.'<sup>2</sup>

The Gulf war thus appears a classic case of the domestic political origins of foreign policy. Bush decided on war in part because of a domestic political collapse of historic proportions, made evident by the mid-term Congressional election campaign. War was worth the risk because it promised to draw attention away from problems at home and remake the president in the image of a decisive and victorious leader.

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\* I wish to thank Perry Anderson, Bob Brenner and Robert Scheer for ongoing discussions, and Kathleen Kennedy for research assistance

<sup>1</sup> Thomas L. Friedman and Patrick E. Tyler, 'From the First, U.S. Resolve to Fight', *New York Times*, 3 March 1991

<sup>2</sup> Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*, New York 1991, pp. 260, 303, 42. Woodward's book 'does not elaborate on the president's political considerations' (Haynes Johnson, 'Book Says Powell Favored Containment', *Washington Post*, 1 May 1991)



How quickly we forget: 'Bush is in deep trouble,' *U.S. News* reported in the last week of October; 'his Presidency is in danger.'<sup>3</sup> David Gergen, Reagan administration Assistant for Communications, wrote the week of the election that Bush was about to join 'the string of broken Presidencies in recent years—Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter'.<sup>4</sup> That same week, the *Washington Post* quoted a Republican politico arguing that 'The White House is booting away the entire legacy of Ronald Reagan.'<sup>5</sup> Between August, when he was concentrating on building support for UN sanctions, and mid October, when the election campaign was reaching its climax, Bush's popularity ratings fell twenty points.<sup>6</sup> Ed Rollins, who had managed the 1984 Reagan campaign, the greatest Republican victory in history, declared on 20 October that Republicans were facing 'a historical trend' in which 'we could have a real disaster on our hands'. 'All of a sudden,' he said, Republicans were 'looking into an abyss'. 'We've been waiting for years for realignment,' an unidentified 'GOP operative' told the *Washington Post* at the end of October, 'unfortunately, George Bush's realignment means it's going to be the Democrats in the majority for the next decade.'<sup>7</sup> The president had 'sunk into a quagmire of indecision and ineptitude' and become 'a man without a mission heading an administration without a purpose,' *U.S. News* declared; 'his "governing" strategy is fatally flawed.' The magazine concluded that 'the Administration needs a complete makeover for Bush's 1992 re-election bid.'<sup>8</sup> This was the point at which the president resolved to double US forces in the Gulf—a decision made on 30 October, according to the *New York Times*—shifting them from a defensive orientation to an offensive one, setting the country and the world on the road to war.

### Shifts in Public Opinion

The big news in the weeks leading up to that decision was that 'Bush's popularity is in a nosedive', as the *Washington Post* reported on 16 October. Anxieties about the economy and the federal-budget impasse, and second thoughts about the US troop deployment in the Gulf, had pushed public confidence in the condition of the country to its lowest level in nearly two decades. Eight out of ten Americans said the country was 'pretty seriously off on the wrong track', the number feeling positive having been halved over the previous month. These findings were 'the most negative result found in a major poll since 1974', when the country was in the depths of the Arab oil embargo and the Watergate crisis.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth T. Walsh with Gloria Burger, 'Can Bush Come Back?' *U.S. News*, 29 October 1990, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> David Gergen, 'Salvaging the Bush Presidency', *U.S. News*, 5 November 1990, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> Marjorie Williams, 'Ed Rollins, in the Worst of Times', *Washington Post*, 20 October 1990.

<sup>6</sup> *New York Times*, 3 March 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Marjorie Williams, 'Ed Rollins, in the Worst of Times'.

<sup>8</sup> Walsh, 'Can Bush Come Back?', p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Morin and Paul Taylor, 'Poll Shows Plunge in Public Confidence', *Washington Post*, 16 October 1990.

The future looked no brighter. Consider Bush's 1992 re-election prospects last October, without a war: the mid-term Congressional election campaign was confirming that no president in memory has entered the last two years of his first term with so few domestic accomplishments, facing so many angry former supporters. He had betrayed his only real promise—'no new taxes'. He had abandoned his pledges to become 'the education president' and 'the environmental president'. As he faced the year leading up to his re-election campaign, the country faced a major recession—the worst in at least a decade—with its banking and financial system in deep trouble; the disappearance of the 'peace dividend', even without a war, to pay for the S&L bail-out; rising conflict over abortion rights and affirmative action; more unemployment, more homelessness, more frustrated and angry voters. What could George Bush claim as a success when he stood for re-election in just two years time?

You don't need to be politically correct to know that when a president faces bad news at home, when the economy turns sour, when voters are angry and unhappy, he can win support by engaging a foreign enemy. Then his critics can be called unpatriotic; then he can say the people who don't support him are not supporting 'our boys'; then he can say we all need to unite behind the president. And he can hope that glorious military victories will erase his domestic failures and earn him not only re-election but also a place in history as a great president. After all, our greatest presidents—Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson and FDR—led us in wartime.

The potential domestic political benefits for Bush and a Gulf war were hardly a secret during that crucial month of October. 'Some observers in his own party worry that the president will feel forced to initiate combat to prevent further erosion of his support at home', the *Washington Post* reported on 28 October.<sup>20</sup> John Sununu, the president's Chief of Staff, was reported to be telling people that 'a short, successful war would be pure political gold for the President, would guarantee his re-election.'<sup>21</sup>

How had the Bush presidency reached this critical state of affairs—where a Middle East war seemed politically desirable, even necessary, to restore the president's re-election chances? The turning point had come in late June, when Bush's abandonment of his 'no new taxes' pledge became a focus for public discontent over the economy and budget. The next poll indicated majority public disapproval of his switch, and revealed Americans to be even more critical of the president's other domestic economic policies. Just over half condemned his tax reversal, while 58 per cent expressed dissatisfaction with his conduct of the S&L crisis, and 64 per cent found fault in his management of the federal deficit. Significantly, his foreign policy remained popular: 82 per cent praised his handling of relations with the USSR (the leading foreign issue, before anything happened in the Gulf).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Juan Williams, 'George Bush and the Politics of Confusion', *Washington Post*, 28 October 1990.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Drew, 'Letter from Washington', *New Yorker*, 4 February 1991, p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Oreskes, 'Support for Bush Declines in Poll', *New York Times*, 11 July 1990.

Saddam Hussein's invasion on 2 August brought a boost for Bush in the polls; but a big jump in gas prices raised the economic anxieties of ordinary Americans to a peak. By late August, the *Wall Street Journal* was reporting 'a rapid shift unusual in polling history' in which the public concluded, 57 to 26 per cent, that there would be a recession in the next twelve months. Only a month earlier, Americans believed by a lopsided 49 to 25 per cent that there wouldn't be one. The *Journal* called it an 'extraordinary turnaround in public opinion' that 'stunned' the experts.<sup>13</sup> Few things damage incumbent presidents more than recessions in election years. By September Bush was being compared to Carter. The *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, commented, 'Not since 1980 and the ill-fated presidency of Jimmy Carter has the triple whammy of war in the Middle East, a recession at home and spiralling oil prices had the potential to raise among voters the concern that the White House has lost control over the country's future.'<sup>14</sup>

Recession fears made Bush's poor performance in the deficit-reduction summit especially significant for the public. By the end of October, a bipartisan agreement produced a compromise package, but House Republicans revolted against Bush's support for it. The president flip-flopped again and again over what new taxes he might support, demonstrating an obsession with protecting the very rich. Finally, Bush opposed a Democratic proposal to raise the tax rate for people earning over \$200,000 a year, enabling Democrats to call him a 'lap-dog of the rich'.<sup>15</sup> Mary Matalin, Chief of Staff of the Republican National Committee, said 'we screwed it up in every possible, conceivable way so we can get bashed by the Democrats.'<sup>16</sup>

Twenty-three days before the election, on 14 October, a *New York Times* poll showed that 'a plurality favor turning the Republicans out of the White House.' A total of 70 per cent believed the economy was getting worse—the largest number to hold this negative view since April 1980, seven months before Jimmy Carter lost his re-election bid. Bush's popularity ratings declined among every major group, 'most dramatically of all' among Americans aged sixty-five and over, the group with the highest turnout rate. Since the preceding poll, one out of every four Americans in this group had shifted from approval to disapproval of Bush.<sup>17</sup>

### 'Republican Civil War'

The Congressional campaign continued ruthlessly to expose Bush's situation. 'Some of the President's campaign appearances are actually backfiring,' *U.S. News* reported; 'support for his candidates drops

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<sup>13</sup> James M. Perry, 'Public Backs Dispatch of Troops to Mideast but Fears for Outcome', *Wall Street Journal*, 21 August 1990.

<sup>14</sup> James Gerstenzang, 'As Peace and Prosperity Outlook Turns Gloomy, a 2nd Term May Not Be a Cinch', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1990.

<sup>15</sup> Dan Balz, 'Bush Seeks Firing of Party Official', *Washington Post*, 26 October 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Juan Williams, 'George Bush and the Politics of Confusion'.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Oreskes, 'Economy and Mideast Standoff Bring a Drop in Bush's Standing', *New York Times*, 14 October 1990.

after he has visited.<sup>18</sup> The *Washington Post* described the situation thus on 23 October: 'In this season of Republican discontent with the president, George Bush has been made to eat from a daily diet of small humiliations dished out by members of his own party. Today, he got another helping.' On a campaign trip, Bush was 'kicked in the shins' by Republican Congressional candidates he was trying to help: he was greeted first, in Vermont, by a candidate who 'won cheers by attacking his policies'; at the next stop, in New Hampshire, the candidate didn't show up; and in Connecticut the candidate was present but did not invite the media to cover his appearance with the president—instead they met in private. For Bush, the *Post* concluded, the campaign ended 'with Republican candidates running away from him. Sometimes they're running against him.'<sup>19</sup>

Republicans privately explained their problem: Bush's policies were oriented towards his own 1992 re-election campaign, at the expense of 1990 Congressional candidates. The White House reversal on taxes was intended to help the deficit and the economy over the next two years, thus protecting Bush's chances in 1992; but the political price would be paid by Republican candidates in 1990. 'He took care of himself and he sacrificed us', one Republican told the *Washington Post*.<sup>20</sup> Opposition to the president reached a climax on 24 October, with the publication of a memo from Ed Rollins, co-chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, advising Republican candidates to 'oppose the president in their campaigns because of Bush's abandonment of his "no new taxes" pledge.'<sup>21</sup> After Bush's forty-state victory in 1988 the Republicans had agreed to pay Rollins a million dollars for a four-year campaign to create a Republican House majority in 1992.<sup>22</sup> Now Bush demanded that Rollins be fired; the press called it 'Republican civil war'.<sup>23</sup>

The collapse of the president's support was all the more significant in light of the fact that ten months earlier, in mid January, following the invasion of Panama, his popularity rating reached 79 per cent—six points higher than Reagan's best showing during his entire two terms, and eleven points higher than at the same point in his first term. The Gallup poll showed even better results for Bush after Panama—the highest rating for any president at that point in his first term since FDR. Only Kennedy came close, with a rating of 77 per cent in January 1962.<sup>24</sup> The significance was obvious: decisive military action against a foreign villain had made Bush the most popular president in modern history—until domestic issues, especially recession, taxes and the budget, destroyed his standing. Now another enemy, even more

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<sup>18</sup> Walsh, 'Can Bush Come Back?' pp. 25–6.

<sup>19</sup> Gerger, 'Salvaging the Bush Presidency', p. 82; Ann Devroy, 'Candidates Spurn Bush's Embrace', *Washington Post*, 24 October 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Balz, 'Bush Seeks Firing of Party Official'.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>22</sup> Marjorie Williams, 'Ed Rollins, in the Worst of Times'.

<sup>23</sup> Balz, 'Bush Seeks Firing of Party Official'.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Morin, 'Poll Shows Rising Support for Bush, Republicans', *Washington Post*, 18 January 1990; Michael Oreskes, 'Approval of Bush, Bolstered by Panama, Sours in Poll', *New York Times*, 19 January 1990.

villainous than Noriega, had appeared. Given the depth of his predicament in October, how could Bush resist the lessons of January?

### Bush's Gamble

The Gulf war, however, would have to be a short war—no more Vietnams. Although most experts warned that a quick victory was unlikely, Bush could find many inside and outside the administration arguing that the US would defeat Iraq in a new Six Day War. The short-war scenario sketched out in the autumn would prove to be accurate; it emphasized the decisive role air power could play in a desert war. *U.S. News* argued that Stealth fighters, supplemented by other aircraft, would quickly eliminate Iraq's air defences, and then bombers would crush the country's military and economic infrastructure. Anthony Cordesman, author of *The Lessons of Modern War*, a history of the Iran–Iraq conflict, emphasized Iraq's vulnerability to air strikes;<sup>25</sup> former Defence Secretary, Harold Brown, told *Time* that 'we would achieve air superiority within a day or two'.<sup>26</sup> Lieutenant General William Odom, former director of the National Security Agency, said that Iraq's best tanks would be 'clobbered' by Apache helicopters, after which the US would 'destroy the Iraqi Army in Kuwait'.<sup>27</sup> Bush didn't have to prove the war would be a short one; he merely had to be convinced that the odds favouring a short war made it a gamble worth taking. There were widespread complaints that the president was ignoring the wise men of the foreign-policy establishment, who were warning of the risks in war; Elizabeth Drew reported that 'very few people were in on the policy-making'—nevertheless, Sununu, whose principal preoccupation was domestic politics, was one.<sup>28</sup>

And so on 30 October, a week before the Congressional elections, Bush secretly approved a timetable for launching an air war against Iraq in mid January and a ground war in February. Only one element of the plan was made public: the announcement on 8 November, two days after the election, that he had ordered the doubling of American forces in the Gulf from 230,000 to more than 500,000.<sup>29</sup> On the same day, the Bush administration began a campaign to persuade the UN to set a deadline for the use of force against Iraq. Most Americans thought such moves were intended to pressure Saddam to withdraw, but as John Newhouse later reported in *The New Yorker*, 'Middle East specialists saw the combination of a doubled American deployment and the deadline as all but certain to bring on a war'.<sup>30</sup>

We have been told that Bush decided on war because it became clear that the sanctions on which he had previously relied were not working. But the administration's own evidence during October was that

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<sup>25</sup> Brian Duffy, 'The Guns of August', *U.S. News*, 20 August 1990, p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce W. Nelson, 'Planes Against Brawn', *Time*, 20 August 1990, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Budiansky, 'Poised to Strike', *U.S. News*, 27 August 1990, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Drew, 'Letter from Washington', p. 84.

<sup>29</sup> Friedman and Tyler, 'From the First, U.S. Resolve to Fight'.

<sup>30</sup> John Newhouse, 'The Diplomatic Round. Misreadings', *New Yorker*, 18 February 1991, p. 72.

the opposite was the case. Secretary of State James Baker told a Senate panel on 17 October that 'sanctions are beginning to have an impact. We believe that the sanctions on exports have been particularly successful. There is no oil getting out.' In secret testimony before a Senate committee, a top CIA official estimated that the sanctions had reduced Iraq's imports by 90 per cent and its exports by 97 per cent. Not a single high-tech military part had been smuggled in.<sup>31</sup> On 28 October, Paul Nitze appeared before another Senate committee to argue strongly for giving the sanctions time to work; no American had more direct experience with national-security affairs than him. Then a parade of eminent authorities testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee, all of whom strongly supported the reliance on sanctions and diplomacy to avoid war: James Schlesinger, former Secretary of Defense and former director of the CIA; two highly respected chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Crowe and General David Jones; and former Secretary of State and former national-security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. Crowe maintained that sanctions were 'biting heavily', the issue 'not whether an embargo will work but whether we will have the patience to let it take effect'. Schlesinger said Iraq's economy 'is rapidly becoming a basket case'.

Finally, CIA director William Webster testified publicly before the House Armed Service Committee that sanctions were working and would bring Iraq's civilian economy to a halt by Spring 1991; Iraq's military, he said, 'could probably maintain near-current levels of readiness [only] for as long as nine months.' But nine months would put the projected resolution of the conflict perilously close to the president's re-election campaign.<sup>32</sup> Thus Bush abandoned sanctions and chose war because his time frame was a political one, set by the approaching 1992 presidential elections. No doubt he was reflecting on the fate of Jimmy Carter in the 1980 election, which took place during an endless Middle East crisis.<sup>33</sup>

Presidents who hope to divert the country by fighting foreign enemies have a problem: Americans seem to have short memories for short wars. Bush had the nation entranced with his Panama putsch, but Americans didn't remain distracted for very long—only ten months—after which they reverted to a preoccupation with domestic problems. Maybe the spectacle of 100,000 Iraqi dead will have provided enough excitement for a while. There is already a postwar letdown; it is the morning after the Gulf war, and dazed Americans have turned off CNN and started looking around, and are seeing the same miserable social and economic problems now that they had before 2 August. Unemployment, the economic recession, homelessness, failing schools, and violent crime have erased the euphoria of victory. The Gulf war may not have given George Bush what he needed for re-election.

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Massing, 'The Way to War', *New York Review*, 28 March 1991, p. 20

<sup>32</sup> Newhouse, 'The Diplomatic Round', p. 74

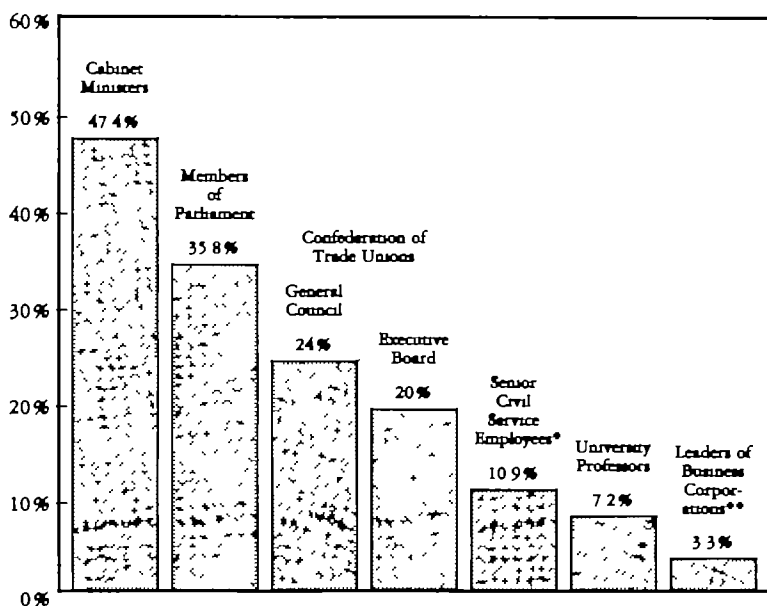
<sup>33</sup> 'Talk of the Town', *New Yorker*, 21 January 1991, p. 24

## *The Uneven Advance of Norwegian Women*

On 9 May 1986, a new social-democratic government was formed in Norway, and a record established. The new prime minister appointed a cabinet in which nearly half the ministers were women. This act created an international media sensation. The *Wall Street Journal* dedicated its front page to the story—'A Distressed Norway Counts on Its Women to Set Things Right'—and another US journal, *Ms Magazine*, chose the prime minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, as its 'Woman of the Year'. Five years later, the media had another record to celebrate: by May 1991 half of the major political parties in Norway had elected a woman as leader. What is more, in the two governments following the Brundtland administration of 1986–89—one non-socialist coalition cabinet and one new Labour cabinet—the same high proportion of ministerial posts was held by women. The last two parliamentary elections have resulted in women occupying about 35 per cent of the seats. This compares to a participation level twenty years ago of below 10 per cent—still the ceiling of many Western countries today.

In the last two decades, Norwegian women's experience of work-force integration has been one common to most Western countries; this increased participation has been reflected in changing employment and trade-union-membership ratios of women to men. But while in traditional political arenas both horizontal and vertical divisions are being erased, within the market-based sector they largely remain, women here being clustered in a few, albeit large, corporations. Relative to their membership, women have achieved few leadership positions within the major unions. Such positions within private business corporations are still almost exclusively held by men, as they are within the state bureaucracy. Within academic institutions the number of women equals the number of men only at the student level.

Figure I.  
Percentage of Women in Different Norwegian Leadership Strata



Sources: Olaf Chr. Torp, *Statistik i navn og tall 1989-93*, Universitetsforlaget Oslo; The Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities; The Equal Status Council.

\* Senior Civil Service percentage is based on 1990 figures.

\*\* Private Business percentage is based on 1989 figures and includes the member corporations of the main Norwegian employers' organization.

Other percentages are based on 1991 figures.

There is a growing international demand for a proven formula on the promotion of women by political parties; and politicians and political scientists are now practised in providing answers. But how are we to explain the relatively untypical trends in the process of political integration, and the differing patterns within the public spheres? How should we understand a situation where, in the same fairly small community, some male parties have opened their doors to women—even to the exclusion of fellow men—while their neighbours still keep the safety-catch on? This challenge forms the point of departure



for this article on Norwegian feminist influences. Standard explanations of 'the Norwegian experience' tend largely to ignore the puzzle of varying patterns within different spheres of public life. Concentrating on the success story of political integration, they stress either *favourable contextual factors* such as proportional representation and multi-party competition, or a *receptive political culture* containing strong norms of justice, equality and solidarity, or the *political activism* of a relatively strong women's movement.

Such factors are obviously less relevant to the hiring processes within private business, the state bureaucracy or academia, where standards of 'merit' still provide the major justification for selective practices that either help maintain, or only slowly change, skewed ratios. While competing for recruits both within and across their own boundaries, these institutions remain largely immune to claims of unfairness based on justifications other than proof of discrimination against individuals. However, references to competition for membership, to the dominant cultural climate, and to pressure politics might have more relevance to selection processes within labour unions, where the leaderships are elected not only on the basis of 'merit' but on that of interest protection. Comparing parties to labour organizations, we might thus consider why the norms of equality so beneficial to party women have made less impact on unions, or why a strong women's movement has primarily influenced political parties.

The process of women's political integration accelerated dramatically at the beginning of the 1980s, when the Labour Party joined the Socialist Left Party in the adoption of quota regulations for all party posts. But within the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions similar quota demands have met with strong resistance, and have so far been rejected. On this issue of integration politics we thus find the traditionally close labour-movement allies, the Labour Party and the Confederation, as antagonists. Why have the two branches of the movement adopted different and opposing positions?

Even within parties, however, important questions remain. For instance, simple statistics show that within similar electoral systems the extent of women's representation varies considerably. Furthermore, norms of equality may embrace a number of underprivileged groups, giving rise to competing demands for special representation. Yet only the principle of 'gender equality' is demonstrably able to produce a near balance in the distribution of elective positions. Finally, general references to the strength of the women's movement provide no direct understanding of how this movement has been able to influence the selection of candidates for political office, a process under the exclusive control of the parties.

It is questions such as these that will be addressed in the following pages. Only when they are combined can studies of favourable contextual factors, a receptive political culture, and the political activism of the women's movement, orientate us toward a comprehensive answer. These elements, however, must be first specified and further elaborated. In combination, they might also help explain the different

representation practices within distinct but comparable organizations. It is, then, particularly important to examine the interplay between the framing of demands for women's representation over the past two decades and the traditional principles of representation guiding selection processes. It is equally important to consider the strategic use of the 'representation profile' as an instrument of competition within the context of both party and labour organization. Thus a broadly positive interpretation of women's political integration is maintained. However, an alternative—negative—interpretation must first be confronted. This can be summed up and assessed by considering a statement on 'women's integration into shrinking institutions'—'shrinking institutions' here referring to once-powerful organizations that have gradually lost their efficacy. The thesis maintains that women gain access to those positions that men compete less eagerly for; men are still holding on to power and influence, but today such positions are located within spheres other than the traditional political one. Thus the 'shrinking institutions' perspective explicitly draws attention not only to relatively rare instances of political inclusion but also to differing patterns of inclusion and exclusion. The challenge is a serious one, not least because of its strong appeal to critical minds: it offers to reveal processes that are only apparently progressive. The claim suggests a final irony: that Norwegian women, in their effort to obtain a more equitable share of power, have chosen to storm the wrong barricades—or slip in the wrong doors.

The 'shrinking institutions' thesis is, however, an inadequate interpretation of political integration—an inadequacy that relates primarily to the statement's empirical foundation. The changes in power relationships over the past twenty to thirty years, on which the statement rests, are in fact open to dispute. Unfortunately, however, the thesis is rarely challenged. Consequently, the logic of 'women's integration into shrinking institutions' tends to be granted the status of truth, thereby contributing to an uncontested myth of women's new powerlessness. This myth simultaneously devalues the significance of women's struggle to gain full citizen status, implying that women did not so much produce change themselves, as have their task made easy.

In what follows, the myth of women's new powerlessness is questioned first through a discussion of its statement on representation as a function of power. Secondly, the vulnerability of 'relative power' interpretations is illustrated through an examination of one particular decision-making process: that leading to the Norwegian Equal Status Act of 1978. Third, the 'shrinking institutions' perspective is assessed in the light of a new public agenda of more women-friendly policies.<sup>1</sup> I then discuss in some detail the more positive interpretation stressing contextual factors, political culture and political activism. Such an approach faces an obvious stumbling block: that a political integration of women has to be accompanied by a political abdication by men. It must also address the question of different patterns of representation within the comparable organizations of parties and unions.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'women-friendly' was first coined by Helga Hernes in *Welfare State and Women Power. Essays in State Feminism*, Oslo 1987.

## Are Women Being Integrated into Shrinking Institutions?

Let us consider the following representative statement commenting on new forms of gender-structured dominance and subordination, and, more generally, on the perceived shift in the realm of political power and decision-making.

The structurally conditioned and veiled aspects of the oppression of women today may be illustrated by what I call women's integration into superfluous or shrinking institutions. Women, as it were, inherit from men positions which have become insignificant or less important as departure points for power and influence.

... Within the area of politics [there is a growing] tendency in Scandinavia, as in the Western world more generally, for decisions to be taken within extraparlimentary bodies. This has arisen at the same time as the proportion of women within Scandinavian parliaments has grown: that is, over a period of twenty to thirty years.<sup>2</sup>

This statement contains an obvious inconsistency. It describes a trend of decreasing parliamentary influence across the Western world, while at the same time acknowledging that the trend of women's integration into parliament is of particular relevance to Scandinavian countries. Furthermore, account cannot be given of differing patterns within similar institutions—why, for instance, the trend of women's integration into shrinking institutions is specific to Scandinavia. Leaving aside the (admittedly brief) reference to 'the Western world', in the Norwegian context the 'shrinking institutions' perspective is only one example from a series of claims that challenge perceptions of parliamentary power. The claims are familiar: power has been transferred from parliament to cabinet and state bureaucracy, from political parties to market-based-interest organizations, from national to international and transnational groups. Much depends, however, on what kind of transfer one chooses to stress. Not all references to 'shrinking institutions' compare 'parliamentary bodies' to 'extraparlimentary' ones. In some instances, a similar claim is made on the basis of statements on power relationships between different party-political bodies. Among Scandinavian scholars there has since the late 1960s been a strong preference for the thesis that stresses the decline of parliament in favour of cabinet government. This viewpoint has then been directly linked to levels of women's representation in claims that there is an iron law at work: 'the more power, the more men'.<sup>3</sup> Such reasoning makes little sense today, however: since 1986 women have been better represented at the level of cabinet than at the level of parliament.

In fact, the relative power of parliament and cabinet in alliance with the state bureaucracy remains a matter of debate. The traditional preference for the 'decline of parliaments' thesis has recently been

<sup>2</sup> Harriet Holter, 'Om kvinneundertrykkelse, mannsundertrykkelse og beraketelekninger', in T. Andenæs et al., eds., *Maktens ansikter*, Oslo 1981, pp. 227–8, my translation.

<sup>3</sup> Torild Skard and E. Heavio-Mannila, 'Equality between the Sexes. Myth or Reality in Norway?', in Stephen R. Graubard, ed., *Norway. The Passion for Equality*, Oslo 1986, p. 191.

challenged by a new thesis on 'resurgence'. Majority governments have been replaced by minority governments; the trend in recent years is, furthermore, towards weaker minority governments. Governments cannot rely to the same extent on permanent support in parliament, but must instead base their existence on insecure and shifting coalitions. Scandinavian parliaments have become forums for real bargaining, as witnessed in the growth of floor and committee activities. Thus long-term trends in the relationship of parliament to cabinet might more properly be characterized as one of 'ebb and flow'.<sup>4</sup>

### A Career in Parliament

When it became clear that three Norwegian parties—the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Centre Party—would from May 1991 be led by women, one major Norwegian newspaper took the opportunity to assert that 'when power disappears, so do the men—politics are now being left to women'.<sup>5</sup> To illustrate this claim, the newspaper presented pictures of eleven prominent male politicians who now occupy positions at the top of state and private business hierarchies. 'Politics' were here treated uniformly; the paper did not distinguish between those who had left positions in cabinet from those who had resigned from parliament. Nor did it differentiate according to these individuals' actual freedom of choice. For instance, the paper did not elaborate the fact that some of the men were former members of a cabinet that had resigned—thus forcing the men to return to the 'civilian' jobs they had left to enter government. '[P]olitics are no longer as attractive to men as they used to be; men now leave politics at an earlier date', the paper claimed, thereby tying 'attractiveness' to 'power'. This linkage is obviously open to question. But even if we accept the attractiveness of the profession as an indicator of power, we might still challenge the relation between 'turnover' and 'attractiveness'. Increased turnover rates do not represent an unambiguous signal that, for example, parliamentary positions have lost their appeal. Variations in voter allegiance might force changes in careers contrary to the preferences of individual politicians. New nomination practices might accomplish the same. For example, when quota rules are introduced—as is already the case in several Norwegian parties—some men might be forced to stand down in favour of women. In point of fact, data for the postwar period show no general tendency towards an increasing turnover among MPs. The proportion of re-elected to newly elected representatives has instead remained

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<sup>4</sup> The 'resurgence' thesis is discussed by, for example, Erik Damgaard, 'The Strong Parliaments of Scandinavia', paper prepared for the Carl Albert Centre Conference, 11–13 April 1990. The 'ebb-and-flow' statement is made by Gudmund Hernes, 'Storung—makt og muligheter', in *Norsk Statsvitenskapelig Tidsskrift*, no. 1, 1985. A claim that political positions at the *national level* provide for more influence than positions at *local and regional levels* would probably be acceptable to most observers—although disagreement might occur if relative-power statements were to be expressed also in terms of redistributions over time. As an implication of the shrinking-institutions claim, we might nevertheless expect women to be better represented at the lower rather than higher levels of politics; in fact there are only small differences in representation rates.

<sup>5</sup> *Dagbladet*, 20 April 1991.

remarkably stable over the past forty years. Neither is there any indication that the average seniority of MPs is declining.<sup>6</sup>

Only for the last two elections does it make sense to compare parliamentary positions in terms of their relative appeal to men and women. Concentrating on the last election—in 1989—there was no obviously different pattern perceptible in the way men took early leave of parliament as compared to women. Relatively more men than women left after having served two periods. Among men and women alike, however, very few left after only one period. In total, relatively more men than women did leave parliament in 1989; but this was mainly due to the fact that more men had a long parliamentary career behind them. Finding a parliamentary position attractive does not imply commitment to a lifelong career in parliament. The 'voluntary leavers'—those not forced to stand down, for example, because of a new party nomination—accordingly stated their motivation for leaving primarily in terms of services long rendered/benefits long received. Few named dissatisfaction or alternative career offers as their main reason.<sup>7</sup> At present, then, there is insufficient evidence to support claims that men find the job less attractive than women do.<sup>8</sup>

A somewhat different approach to the question of attractiveness is to focus instead on those who enter the profession—that is, on changing patterns of recruitment. It is not uncommon, for example, to interpret a falling intake of young persons as a signal that a particular profession is losing its appeal. However, no such trend is observable in the case of the Norwegian parliament. The average age of male MPs has decreased during the postwar period; the proportion of men less than forty years old has increased. Neither do those characteristics indicating MPs' status before entering parliament suggest that it has become more difficult to recruit men MPs from the higher social strata. Data for the postwar period instead show that parliament has become increasingly elitist in terms of members' educational—to a lesser degree also their occupational—background. Elite characteristics are more common—but not decreasingly so—among men MPs than among their women colleagues.<sup>9</sup>

### The Corporate Channel

The 'decline of parliament' thesis has not only addressed power

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<sup>6</sup> Bjørn Erik Rasch, 'Kontinuitet og fornyelse. Utvikling av stortingsrepresentanter ved valg', paper given to the ninth Nordic Political Science Congress, Reykjavik, Iceland 15–19 August 1990.

<sup>7</sup> The source of these data is an interview series I undertook in the spring of 1989 with Norwegian members of parliament who had served between 1985 and 1989. These interviews form part of a larger research project on the implications of women's participation in elite politics, funded by the Norwegian Research Council for Applied Social Science, NORAS. 146 out of a total of 157 MPs participated in this interview series.

<sup>8</sup> Whether this might yet turn out to be an adequate prediction for future developments is of little relevance to the issue at stake here: the question, rather, is whether men's flight from politics provides a proper explanation for women's entry.

<sup>9</sup> An extensive analysis of the social and political background of members of parliament is reported in Hege Skjeie and Mari Teigen, *Stortingsrepresentantenes sosiale og politiske bakgrunn—nye variasjoner over et ufershet tema*, ISF Arbeidsnotat 91: 2, Oslo

relationships within the traditional political arena, but also the relative power of political parties and the organized interests of labour and business. Among Norwegian political scientists, Stein Rokkan was among the first to question the omnipotence of a *numerically based channel* of influence as compared to what he termed a *corporate channel*—that is, the channel through which interest groups participate in public decision-making.<sup>10</sup> This is not, however, to deny traditional political arenas influence, nor to claim that they lose in relative terms. These power relationships are the subject of ongoing debate. Even within 'The Power Project'—a ten-year research programme set up to investigate the distribution of power within Norwegian society—opinions varied. Trends in redistribution have been difficult to ascertain. And in terms of power relationships, the project's conclusion was rather ambiguous. Whether the issue was the role of interest organizations, economic organizations at large, or the public bureaucracy, the 'Power Project' employed concepts like 'bargaining', 'coordination', 'integration', and even 'inter-dependency', to express the relationships between different power groups.<sup>11</sup>

In the Norwegian context, 'bargaining' is expressed institutionally through an elaborate system of public boards and commissions. This system provides one central arena for negotiations over the formulation of public policies, and is still recognized as an important meeting place for political representatives, organizational leaders, civil servants, and those with legal and technical expertise. Women's weaker presence within most of these relevant strata of leadership has often been presented as preventing their access to corporate decision-making.<sup>12</sup> However, this under-representation is no longer accepted as a valid reason for the exclusion of women. In Norway, the use of gender quotas for public office is not restricted to political parties; they also regulate access to the corporate system of publicly appointed boards and commissions.

For more than fifteen years the gender composition of these public commissions has been a stated concern of political parties. The first interventions aiming to regulate their composition demanded that all nominating agencies should propose women as well as men candidates. These early interventions took the form of royal decrees passed by Labour governments. Today a 40:60 per cent quota system is specified through the Equal Status Act, regulating the composition of publicly appointed bodies on both national and local levels. Economic-interest organizations are major participants within this system of public policy-making. As such they must comply with regulations on composition.

It will be instructive to examine now, in some detail, the process that

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<sup>10</sup> Stein Rokkan, 'Norway: Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism', in R.A. Dahl, ed., *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, New Haven 1966.

<sup>11</sup> See Gudmund Hernes, *Forhandlingsøkonomi og blandingssamfunnet*, Oslo 1978, also Johan P. Olsen, *Organized Democracy*, Oslo 1983.

<sup>12</sup> See Helga Hernes and E. Hanninen-Salmelin, 'Women in the Corporate System', in E. Haavio-Mannila et al., eds., *Unfinished Democracy: Women in Nordic Politics*, London 1985.

Table I.  
Proportion of Women in Public (State Appointed) Boards,  
Councils, and Committees, 1967-1989 (%)

1967	1972	1977	1980	1983	1986	1989
7	11	17	24	27	31	35

Source: Report No. 7, 1990, to the Storting

led to the passing of the 1978 Equal Status Act. The framing of this legislation, in what has been termed 'the decade of the women's movement',<sup>13</sup> is a story of direct confrontation between a governmental party, the Labour Party, and a major interest organization, the Confederation of Trade Unions, over the formulation of new equality policies. It also includes as major participants representatives of the feminist movement. Although the story cannot itself address the question of the redistribution of power over time, it nevertheless bears directly on the question of relative power under discussion. It clearly illustrates how conclusions can rest with the inclinations of observers. Some might choose to underscore the part of the story that shows the strength of organization-based influence on what is constitutionally an important parliamentary responsibility; others will prefer to stress how organizations participated in the consultation process at the invitation of political parties, or how parliament could still choose either to ignore or to veto outright the viewpoints of organized interests.

### The Making of the Equal Status Act

The Equal Status Act is a key pillar of official Norwegian equal-status policy. Introduced as one of the ten major promises in the Labour Party's 1973 election programme, the Act was designed primarily as a regulation covering working life: to grant women equal access to the labour market through the prohibition of discriminatory practices, and to limit the negative consequences, in terms of wage distribution, of segregated labour markets.<sup>14</sup>

Confederation representatives were included in the informal 'party committee' that initially supervised the ministerial drafting of the Act. They thus had ample opportunity to present their viewpoints at an early stage. This committee comprised only party and union representatives, and its existence was not made public. Confederation officials were infuriated by Labour Party attempts to regulate wage negotiations—an area the Confederation felt belonged to market participants and their organizations, free from state interference. The Confederation first protested against a suggested pay regulation that aimed to reduce 'unreasonable' wage differentials between (broadly

<sup>13</sup> Harriet Holter and R. Haukaa, 'Kvinneår og kvinnefrigjøring', in Semmingsen et al., eds., *Norges Kulturhistorie*, Oslo 1981.

<sup>14</sup> This presentation builds on my dissertation, 'Likestillingsloven som beslutningsprosess' (The Equal Status Act as Decision-Making Process), Institute of Political Science, University of Oslo, 1982.

speaking) women and men, maintaining that a regulation limited to 'equal pay for equal work' was both sufficient and the only acceptable legal formula. At the public hearings a majority of the participants disagreed with this, citing the principle of 'equal pay for work of equal value' established by the ILO convention on equal pay. In a public statement, the Confederation conceded this point. But it disputed the suggestion that such wage comparisons could also be made when workers were engaged by different employers. The Confederation would not yield on this point, nor on the enforcement of pay regulations. This latter was originally meant to be under the jurisdiction of the Equal Status Ombud and the Commission empowered to enforce the Act. But according to the Confederation, pay disputes involving collective agreements could only be settled in the labour courts, where both the employers' and the employees' organizations hold seats

The 'party committee' was not the only informal forum established during this law-making process. The Norwegian feminist movement, which at first expressed little interest in state-initiated attempts to promote formal equality, at a later stage became involved to the point where one of its branches took an active part in drafting new legislative proposals on behalf of the Socialist Left Party. The broad concerns of the movement were with fundamental changes in society's basic production/reproduction division, rather than with the provision of legal statements on non-discrimination. Nevertheless, its main point of attack concerned just such statements. The principle of gender neutrality laid down in the draft proposal could do little, feminists maintained, to strengthen women's position in society. A gender-neutral ban on discriminatory practices would allow only equal treatment of unequals and preclude exactly those measures that might be effective in improving the situation of women.

In its position of minority government, the Labour Party depended on support from the Socialist Left Party to get the proposal through parliament. Instead the latter sided with the feminist movement. The party's representatives would accept neither the gender-neutral profile of the Act, nor the limited proposals on wage regulation. The debate was thus repeated in every aspect in parliament, and the proposed Act was returned to the cabinet for further consideration. It was finally adopted only with the support of the Conservative Party, at which point some concessions had been made to the fact that gender-based discrimination is suffered mainly by women. Thus an opening for the use of positive discrimination in favour of women was established in the law's general clauses (paragraphs 1 and 3). Further concessions on the wage issue were not made however.

The power of organized interests was thus revealed in their influence on that fundamental parliamentary responsibility—the process of law-making. The Confederation participated by invitation from the Labour Party. The feminist movement was invited in by the Socialist Left Party. The Confederation succeeded in narrowing the scope of the equal-pay legislation; the feminist movement managed to broaden the scope of legal measures to promote equality. But does this imply a



relative lack of power in either the party or parliament? Not necessarily. The making of the Equal Status Act might well purport to show the power of different actors at different stages of the decision-making process. It can be argued that due to party initiative a new area of state responsibility was created. After all, the Labour Party decision to establish a legal regulation of wage settlements was not overturned, even if finally its scope was to be severely limited. Furthermore, although the principles laid down in the early stages had a continued bearing throughout the law-making process, at later stages the fate of the Equal Status Act rested solely with political parties.

### A New Public Agenda

The making of the Equal Status Act demonstrates an important aspect of party-based political power: the limits of state intervention are regularly defined on the basis of party preferences. Fundamental differences between political parties are revealed in their judgement of what these proper limits should be. Politicians choose to increase their own influence and power when they add new issues to the public-policy agenda. And, over the past two decades, new equal-opportunity and care policies have accounted for a significant expansion in the perceived political responsibilities of governments. These now include not only the formal regulation of equal rights and the establishment of official bodies to promote equality, but also increased public transfers and grants for separate policy measures.<sup>15</sup>

Following the adoption of the Act, equal opportunity policies concentrated largely on efforts to grant women equal access to education and paid employment. Such measures include the posting of women's counsellors in public employment agencies, special grants to employers who recruit women (or men) for non-traditional jobs, state subsidies to aid women's entrepreneurial efforts, and plans to promote the recruitment of women to public leadership positions. They have also introduced positive-discrimination measures aimed at easing women's access to higher education. Non-traditional educational choices are further supported through educational counselling, non-discriminatory textbooks, and teachers' courses on equality issues. Women's studies benefit from public grants, and programmes to recruit women for research positions have been launched on several occasions.

Such policies aim to provide desegregation incentives. The Norwegian labour market has been portrayed as divided by gender to such a degree that women and men rarely compete for the same jobs. Office work, teaching and the caring professions have been the main areas of increased employment opportunities for women. In total, 53 per cent of working women are currently employed in occupations that are 90–100 per cent dominated by women, with 32 per cent in occupations that are 60–90 per cent dominated by women.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This summary of equal opportunity/care policies over the past two decades is based on an analysis of party programmes and parliamentary decisions from 1973 to 1989, in Hege Skjerve 'The Ending of a Male Political Hegemony', in Kåre Sævi and L. Svendsen, eds., *Challenges to Political Parties*, forthcoming 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Løken, no. 1, *Likestillingrådet*, Oslo 1991. See also Skard and Havvi-Mannila, 'Equality between the Sexes'.

Segregation is perceived as an equality problem not least because it is reflected in pay distribution—wage differentials between work mainly performed by women and work mainly performed by men. The adoption of the Equal Status Act in 1978 implied that the official approach to the wage problem now concentrated on the principle of 'equal pay for work of equal value'. In terms of party initiatives, then, the broader issue of women's pay has been raised only implicitly through equality plans proposing desegregation. Otherwise the question has largely been left to negotiations between employers and employees.

By the end of the 1980s, wage differentials between men and women across all occupations were such that women earned on average 23 per cent less per hour than men. Allowing for factors of education and work experience, the difference is on average 18 per cent. About half of this is accounted for by the fact that occupations with a high density of female employment pay less than occupations with a high density of males. Trade unions now face a challenge from studies that reveal wage differentials to be greater under the practice of industry-wide bargaining than is the case in both company-level bargaining and sectors without collective agreements.<sup>17</sup>

While the new politics of labour-market equality set out by portraying women in a new role—namely, in search of paid employment—they largely ignored women's traditional role as carer. As growing numbers of mothers with small children have entered the labour market, the shortage of care arrangements has become increasingly apparent. Norway has long held claim to the worst child-care provision in Scandinavia. As a consequence, during the 1980s the equal-opportunity agenda has shifted towards an increasing concern with *care policies*. These policies give the state a more active role in the organizing and funding of child care. From the mid 1980s onwards, this new area of political priority witnessed several extensions of the publicly financed parental-leave period and an increase in state subsidies to promote child-care centres. Most political parties acknowledge these new initiatives to be a direct result of women's increased participation in party politics.

The new agenda includes initiatives primarily created by the parties themselves, but it also reflects how the political demands of the new feminist movement have been gradually incorporated into both party politics and state policies. In the early 1970s, the women's movement demanded a six-hour working day, full child-care facilities, and more collective forms of housing. It demanded the right to abortion; it focused on the physical and sexual oppression suffered by women, and proposed to fight prostitution, rape and other forms of abuse.<sup>18</sup> The right to abortion was guaranteed by law in 1978. A commitment to reducing working-hours has been included in the political programmes of both the Socialist Left Party and the Labour Party. Priority

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<sup>17</sup> Erling Barth and Arne Mørtekaas, *Lønnsforskjeller mellom kvinner og menn i offentlig og privat sektor*, in *Skyldig på arbeidsmarkedet*, no. 2, 1990, and Erling Barth, *Lønnsforskjeller mellom kvinner og menn i ulike avtaleområder*, manuscript, Institute for Social Research, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> See also Skard and Haavio-Mannila, 'Equality between the Sexes'

Table II.  
Publicly Subsidized Daycare for Children, 1984 and 1987  
(coverage rate by age group)

Age	0-2		3-6		0-6	
Year	1984	1987	1984	1987	1984	1987
Coverage rate	8%	8%	42%	50%	27%	32%

*Source:* Oddbjørn Knudsen, 'Organisering av barneomsorgen og skolebarneomsorgen i de nordiske landene: En komparativ studie av institusjoner, undanninger og personell', Oslo, INAS rapport 90 4

building of child-care centres has recently been recommended in a parliamentary proposal: 'Child-Care Facilities Towards the Year 2000'. In this way it is intended to provide kindergarten places for all who want them, by the end of the century. Plans exist to extend parental leave (presently thirty-eight weeks on 80 per cent pay) to one year. Shelters for abused women are now run through state and municipal financing; prostitution is combatted through municipality projects. Once again, the actual significance of these new public policies remains a matter of dispute, among observers and political activists alike.

The gradual inclusion by traditional policy-makers of new demands often generates somewhat different policies from those intended. Not all initiatives succeed, and few have been adopted without resistance. Initiatives adopted at the centre are not always implemented locally. They have mobilized women as political actors—but often in opposing camps. The abortion issue, for instance, created a fierce political struggle, with women demonstrating both in favour of and against the proposed law. The adoption of new policies by political parties is often done in ways which help maintain, or even strengthen, traditional political cleavages.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the outcome regularly reveals acceptance of the principle of greater state responsibility to help solve the problems faced by women. Cross-party alliances between women are still a rarity. Yet new efforts are being made to construct—or reconstruct—economic issues relating to wages and pension rights in terms of broader 'women's initiatives'.

To regard these new controversies as unambiguous evidence of women's political powerlessness is, however, a serious misconception. Hopefully the above discussion has thrown doubt on the validity of the thesis of women's integration into shrinking institutions. It has, of course, left us with an unanswered question: why have women gained access to the formerly male-dominated world of party politics, but not to the still male-dominated world of union politics?

<sup>19</sup> This process is described in detail in Hege Skjeie, 'The Ending of a Male Political Hegemony'.

## Campaigning for Representation

Fifteen years ago Scandinavia was already identified as 'the only significant exception to the general exclusion of women from positions of political leadership'.<sup>20</sup> One reason for this was found in the historical strength of the women's movements in Scandinavian countries. But in what way has the women's movement been able to influence party-based selection and nomination processes? Why was this influence successful only from the 1970s onwards? And why is no parallel impact visible in union-representation statistics?

In line with other Western countries, the history of Norwegian feminist political activism contains two distinct waves.<sup>21</sup> The first was closely connected to the fight for suffrage. This period saw the establishment of unaffiliated women's-right organizations, but the issue also made an impact on parties. Formal women's factions have long been a part of the organizational structure of Norwegian political parties, some dating back to the beginning of the century. Their aim has generally been twofold: to educate women for public office and to promote issues of particular relevance to women. But while some of these factions have nearly as long a history as the parties themselves, decisive changes in women's political representation have occurred only during the past two decades.

The second wave of feminism from the end of the 1960s served to revitalize existing women's organizations. An unusual alliance was created between associations and groups outside, and the women's factions within, the parties. Its specific aim was to increase women's political representation, and this took the form of a series of campaigns in connection with national and local political elections. The 1970s got a head start when what has been labelled 'The Women's Coup' produced a majority of women members in three large local councils, among them that of the Norwegian capital, Oslo. Although this majority did not survive the next election, it successfully demonstrated the power of coordinated action. Fundamentally nonpartisan, the strategy has had two strands: campaigns linked to national elections, which have primarily concentrated on party nominations, and campaigns linked to local elections, which have also been aimed at the general electorate. In the latter, voters were given an opportunity to influence the selection of individuals on the party lists.

This period was not only witness to a specific campaign strategy used to further women's representation; it also heralded a new way of arguing this cause.<sup>22</sup> In the struggle for suffrage nearly a century

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, New Jersey 1976, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> See Beatrice Halsaa, *Politics and Strategies on Women in Norway. The Role of Women's Organisations, Political Parties and Governments*, Oppland Regional College, 1989; also Drude Dahlerup and B. Gulli, 'Women's Organizations in the Nordic Countries: Lack of Force or Counterforce?', in Haavio-Mannila et al., eds., *Unfinished Democracy*, and Skard and Haavio-Mannila, 'Equality between the Sexes'.

<sup>22</sup> The following description largely builds on material published in Høge Skjerve, 'The Rhetoric of Difference. On Women's Inclusion in Political Elites', in *Politics and Society*, no. 2, 1991.

before, the 'common concerns of womanhood' were at the centre. From the 1970s this appeal was again to become the primary motivation for women's participation in politics. Within feminist political-science scholarship, a perspective that stressed gender-structured political interests was combined with an emphasis on political integration as a strategy of empowering women. Prominent scholars were often themselves politically active, thus providing a direct link between research and action.<sup>23</sup> In political discourse, arguments that emphasized the relevance of difference became increasingly important. These were phrased either in terms of 'conflicting interests' or 'complementary resources'. Both maintained that actual representation—by women on behalf of women—was necessary; men could not represent their values or interests. Neither of the new 'difference' arguments, however, specified which experiences were complementary and which interests were in conflict. By failing to define the points of conflict in actual decision-making, the possible threat posed by women to established party priorities and leaderships was thus played down. The arguments, furthermore, provided sufficient diversity to fit the ideological profiles of different political parties. While arguments cast in terms of conflicts of interest suited left ideologies, those engaged with resource supplies were more in line with conservative ideologies.<sup>24</sup>

To the degree that 'interest' and 'resource' arguments merged into more general claims of 'group representation', they also tapped a strong tradition of social representativeness within Norwegian politics. Because of the importance attached by parties to social background, Norway is widely held to have produced parliamentary assemblies that reflect the composition of society more faithfully than do most national legislatures.<sup>25</sup> The technique of 'descriptive representation' creates a profile of a candidate by linking his or her background data to a supposedly resultant set of experiences, and thus to the political views the candidate holds.<sup>26</sup> By thus establishing what is defined as a relevant social representation or profile, a larger representativeness of opinion is assured. 'Descriptive representation' has long provided legitimacy for, and furthered the cause of, differing political groups. As an active constituent in Norway's political culture, it has undoubtedly played a part in the rapid assimilation of the principle of women's integration. Today, the credo on the political relevance of gender is shared by most Norwegian political leaderships. Men and women alike now conceptualize gender specificity and difference as being directly relevant to political decision-making.<sup>27</sup>

Women's increasing integration into party politics—particularly marked during the 1970s and 1980s—is a development shared by

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, 'Preface' to Haavio-Mannila et al., eds., *Unfinished Democracy*.

<sup>24</sup> For a closer study, see Helga Hernes, 'Welfare State and Woman Power'.

<sup>25</sup> The standard nomination references are Henry Valen, 'The Recruitment of Parliamentary Nominees in Norway', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, vol. 1, 1966, and 'Norway. Decentralization and Group Representation', in M. Callaghan and M. Marsh, eds., *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective*, London 1988.

<sup>26</sup> Hannah Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, California 1967.

<sup>27</sup> See Hege Skjete, 'The Rhetoric of Difference'.

Table III.

Proportion of Women in National Legislatures, Western Europe,  
Single Chamber or Lower House of Parliament (%), 1990 Figures

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Sweden	38.1
Norway	35.8
Finland	31.5
Denmark	30.7
Netherlands	25.3
Iceland	20.6
Germany (Federal Republic)	15.4
Switzerland	14.0
Spain	13.4
Italy	12.9
Austria	10.9
Belgium	8.5
Ireland	7.8
Portugal	7.6
United Kingdom	6.3
France	5.7
Greece	5.3

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*ALAN SOURCE:* The Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, Press Release 12 July 1990

most other Nordic countries. Representation in national political bodies has risen from a low of 9 per cent (Norway) and a high of 17 per cent (Finland) at the beginning of the 1970s, to current rates ranging between a low of 31 per cent (Denmark) and a high of 38 per cent (Sweden). The traditional Nordic 'passion for equality' has served as the reference point for most efforts to explain what are relatively isolated cases. The Nordic countries are small and fairly homogeneous, and values of justice, equality and solidarity are considered to be strong. Thus, the explanation goes, when women demanded political representation as a group, their claim received recognition and was regarded as legitimate by party leaderships.<sup>28</sup>

In this connection it is important, however, to note the specificity of the Norwegian case; in particular, the exact meanings conveyed by the terms 'justice' and 'equality'. To recapitulate: arguments for 'equality', interpreted as individuals' right to equal—non discriminatory—treatment, have not constituted the prime motivation behind demands for representation; rather, it has been a stress on difference that has provided the crucial link to traditional representational concerns. While individual party women demanded 'fair treatment' in the competition for political positions, they simultaneously emphasized a more general claim for women's rights to be represented by women.

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<sup>28</sup> See Skard and Haavio-Mannila, 'Equality between the Sexes', p. 193; also Helga Hernes, 'Welfare State and Woman Power'; and J. Fagerberg, Å. Cappelen, L. Mjøset, R. Skarstein, 'The Decline of Social Democratic State Capitalism in Norway', *NLR* 181, May–June 1990

The significance of descriptive representation is, however, not restricted to the area of party politics. It pertains to a number of activities, among them Confederation representation practices. A study of the debates on gender quotas within the organization during the 1980s revealed that arguments are made on the same basis as in party contexts—mainly by maintaining the political relevance of gender differences. Again references are made either to 'resources' or to 'interests', although here more specifically tied to working conditions, environment and wages. But in the Confederation context new arguments on the political relevance of difference have not been sufficient to change old recruitment patterns.<sup>29</sup>

The largest umbrella association for organized labour in Norway happens to be the one where women hold the lowest percentage of leadership positions. This is despite the fact that the total number of women Confederation members has increased from about 20 per cent of the total in the early 1970s to nearly 40 per cent at the beginning of the 1990s. The overall growth in membership over this period is almost exclusively due to new women members. Yet the percentage of women in Confederation leadership positions remained below a ten per cent threshold until the mid 1980s. In the absence of quotas, women's achievement of such positions proceeds only slowly.

How has it remained possible for the Confederation leadership to ignore women's claim for representation when this claim is built on a principle of relevance to parties and labour organizations alike? One important difference may be found in the varying competition structures within different institutional settings. On the one hand we have a setting where political parties depend on a competition for votes. On the other hand we have a setting where one major player, the Confederation, has had nearly hegemonic control as an umbrella organization up to the last decade. Here competition for membership occurred only when two new umbrella organizations were established towards the end of the 1970s.<sup>30</sup> The principle of descriptive representation provides legitimacy to those claims for group representation generated from within. However, when claims for equal representation can also be made by reference to possible external reactions against perceived trends of exclusiveness—in particular, sanctions—the pressure will increase further.

In the party context, the effect of competition on integration profiles is suggested in available studies of women's representation rates within different electoral systems. Proportional elections in multi-member

<sup>29</sup> This study is reported in Hege Skjeie, *Rapport fra (den siste) skisse: Kvinnerepresentasjon i fagbevegelsen* (Report from a Last Fortress: Women's Representation in the Confederation of Trade Unions), nr Rapport no. 7, 1988, Oslo.

<sup>30</sup> Currently the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions has approximately 780,000 members. About 40 per cent of the members are women, on the executive board 20 per cent are women. The Confederation of Vocational Unions has some 180,000 members, of which about 70 per cent are women; on the executive board 26 per cent are women. The Association of Academic Professions has in the region of 200,000 members. Here, however, representation rates more or less balance: a total of 40 per cent women members corresponds to 38 per cent on the executive board.

districts lend themselves to the election of women more readily than do majority elections in single-member districts. In proportional systems a woman candidate will not be the party's only representative within a given election; this is often held to improve women's chances of nomination.<sup>31</sup> Another favourable condition is created by the competition structure: proportional systems favour multi-party electoral fields. These might, additionally, be sensitive to competition in the form of chain reactions—one party following the example of another. When 'gender' is acknowledged as being politically relevant, a low representation of women on party election lists arguably might alienate women voters. Thus when one party actively promotes women candidates, the fear of losing women voters may force the others to follow. A tacit agreement on 'adequate representation' is probably more easily sustained the fewer parties it includes.

### Competition for Votes

Cross-nationally, left parties are often considered more willing to include women representatives than right parties.<sup>32</sup> Comparing only the party extremes, or concentrating mainly on recent representation statistics, this would hold true for Norwegian developments. However, a closer examination shows less consistency. By the early 1980s most Norwegian parties included a woman among their top leadership. Recent years have seen a definite pattern of increase in what is perceived to be the acceptable minimum proportion of women cabinet ministers, and this regardless of which party has held the government. From the end of the 1960s, the norm was at least two women cabinet ministers. In Gro Harlem Brundtland's first cabinet (1981) the numbers doubled, and a minimum of four women ministers was established. In Brundtland's next cabinet (1986) the numbers doubled again, apparently setting a new standard.<sup>33</sup>

Table IV.  
Proportion of Women in the Norwegian Parliament, 1969–1989 (%)

	1969	1973	1977	1981	1985	1989
Socialist Left Party	–	19	50	50	50	41
Labour Party	15	19	26	33	42	51
Centre Party	–	14	8	18	17	27
Christian People's Party	7	5	14	7	25	36
Conservative Party	7	17	29	25	30	30
Progress Party	–	–	–	–	–	5
Total Percentage	9	16	24	26	34	36

Sources: Elina Haavio-Mannila et al., *Unfinished Democracy. Women in Nordic Politics*, London 1985; Olaf Chr. Torp, *Stortings i norsk og tall 1985–89 & 1989–93*, Oslo 1986, 1990.

<sup>31</sup> See Wilma Rule, 'Why Women Don't Run: The Critical Contextual Factors in Women's Legislative Recruitment', in *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1981, and Skard and Haavio-Mannila, 'Mobilisation of Women at Elections'.

<sup>32</sup> See Pippa Norris, *Politics and Sexual Equality*, Brighton 1987.

<sup>33</sup> See Skard and Haavio-Mannila, 'Mobilisation of Women', for wider Nordic patterns.



Table V.  
Proportion of Women in Norwegian Local Councils, 1967–1987  
(%)

	1967	1971	1975	1979	1983	1987
Red Electoral Alliance	–	–	50	33	27	17
Socialist Left Party	11	16	35	43	41	46
Labour Party	11	15	14	23	25	35
Liberals	9	17	17	31	31	41
Centre Party	7	13	13	20	20	25
Christian People's Party	9	15	16	21	23	29
Conservative Party	14	23	18	23	22	29
Progress Party			10	6	12	15
Total Percentage	10	15	15	23	24	31

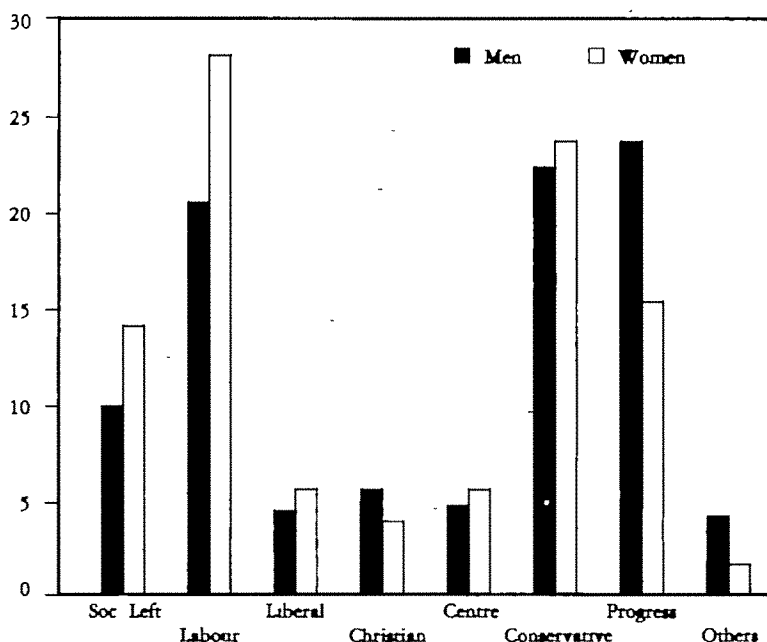
Sources: Elina Haavio-Mannila et al., *Unfinished Democracy Women in Nordic Politics*, London 1985; Olaf Chr. Torp, *Stortinget i norsk og tall 1985–89 & 1989–93*, Oslo 1986, 1990

Through most of the 1970s the differences in women's representation within the Labour and the Conservative parliamentary delegations were rather small. Within the medium-sized and conservatively inclined parties—the religious Christian People's Party and the agriculturally based Centre Party—women's representation rates have varied from election to election. The general trend, nevertheless, is one of increasing integration, continuing into the 1980s. The Socialist Left Party's delegations have maintained close to a fifty-fifty balance in most elections since the Party's founding in 1975.

Differences between the Left and Right in Norway have grown during the 1980s. Since the Labour Party joined the Socialist Left Party in adopting quota policies, its delegations have been moving towards a gender balance. On the other hand, the exception to the general trend is the right-wing Progress Party, which has very few women in leadership positions, and has so far resisted attempts to politicize the recruitment of women. Over the past decade the Conservative Party has faced increased competition from the Progress Party—now the third largest parliamentary party in Norway. The competition seen in the 1980s—when integration politics became an issue of quotas—probably goes a long way to explaining the differing integration strategies of the major right and left parties. While the left parties' quota initiatives have now been adopted by the Centre Party, and are only 'postponed' within the Christian People's Party, they have so far been rejected by the Conservatives.

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the breakthrough for women's representation. These decades also saw the breakdown of established party loyalties. As a consequence, the traditional dominance of the left party bloc has been considerably weakened; but these parties have, nevertheless, strengthened their position among women voters. The gender

Figure II.  
First-time Voters by Gender and Party, 1989 (%)



Source: H. Valen, B. Aardal and G. Vogt, *Endring og kontinuitet* (Change and Continuity), 1990, no. 74, Central Bureau of Statistics, Oslo 1990.

gap of the 1980s is most pronounced among the young.<sup>34</sup> The adoption of quotas by the Labour Party has resulted in an integration profile identical to that of the Socialist Left Party—a possible electoral advantage, especially in the competition for young women voters on the left.

The party politicians themselves relate recent voting patterns to their leading position on women's representation. When asked in 1988 why the Labour Party seemed so far *not* to have received a full return for its integration investment, the prime minister denied this was the case, responding: 'I am quite convinced that the party has recruited more women as a result of our policy than we would have if one hadn't existed.'<sup>35</sup> Significantly, the Socialist Left Party's grand old lady, Hanna Kvanmo, has admitted her ambivalence toward the appointment of Brundtland as leader of the social democrats: joy that a woman achieved the position, but concern about the effect on competition for women voters.<sup>36</sup> To the majority of the Conservative Party leadership, quotas might be viewed as too drastic a means of redistribution, out of line

<sup>34</sup> Henry Valen and D. Urwin, 'De politiske partiene', in T. Nordby, ed., *Storting og regjering 1945-1985*, Oslo 1985; Ola Lishaug, A. Müller and H. Valen, 'The Gender Gap in Norwegian Voting Behaviour', in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, no. 3/85; Henry Valen, B. Aardal and G. Vogt, *Endring og kontinuitet. Stortingsvalget 1989*, Oslo 1990.

<sup>35</sup> *Arbeiderbladet*, 5 June 1988.

<sup>36</sup> Hanna Kvanmo, 'Søsterbrev fra venstresida', in R. Hirsti, ed., *Grenset i livet*, Oslo 1989.

with basic party ideology. But the party also has to watch its right flank, where it competes with the Progress Party, particularly for the young male voters. In this case quota regulations appear to be of little strategic advantage.

Broad similarities in the patterns of integration strongly suggest that competition has worked to the advantage of women. At the same time, party competition goes a long way towards explaining an apparent puzzle. The political integration of women has to be accompanied by a political abdication by men—a logic determined by the finite number of positions available (in elective bodies, as opposed to, say, leaderships of organizations, the total number of representatives remains fixed). The abdication problem is obviously most dramatically posed when quotas are introduced. But unavoidable changes imposed on a given aggregate need not be perceived as pressure on its individual members. All political parties seek to increase their share of available elective positions. If the sharing of seats within a party is viewed as a means to increase its total share of seats, the integration problem is resolved, if only at the party level. The premiss of an integration policy—which is not required to be true, but only accepted—is that women candidates will attract women voters, without alienating too many men, and consequently contribute to the winning of most votes. The rather obvious fact that it is not possible for all parties to gain new voters may, then, be of little help in preventing a chain reaction stemming from the fear of losing voters by being left behind.

### Union Leadership in a Changing Labour Market

The segregated nature of the Norwegian labour market is reflected in the make-up of the Confederation of Trade Unions. The majority of women members are concentrated in only a few organizations. The all-important principle is that of representation by the main occupations. What is more, the leaders of the largest member organizations hold the leadership positions within the umbrella association. These factors maintain a rigid obstacle to competing claims of gender representation. The overall increase in Confederation membership in recent decades has come mainly through growth in the public sector. Despite such developments, the large private-sector unions, with very few women members and almost none in leadership positions, have retained their long-standing representation within the Confederation's executive bodies.

The total number of leadership posts in these bodies is small. What is more, internal competition is severely restricted by 'incumbency' practices; these apply both to the representation of member organizations and to the claims of individuals. Within the Confederation, election to such positions is usually until retirement. Therefore, any decision to promote decisive change in the gender composition of executive bodies would force not only the resignation or early retirement of individuals, but also a choice between drastically changing the recruitment policies of the large organizations and transforming established principles of representation. The only way to avoid this

would be to increase the total number of representatives in the main executive bodies.

The Confederation does not allow separate organizations or forums for women. The kind of institutionalized pressure politics sanctioned by most Norwegian parties is thus ruled out. New claims for representation to be based on quota demands were first raised by a small, informal women's opposition consisting of individual members of different organizations. However, from the early 1980s quota measures have also been advocated by several public-sector organizations. But such reforms remain opposed by most bodies within the private sector.

Incentives to change the leadership profile of one of the remaining predominantly male clubs in Norway may, nevertheless, be growing, as new umbrella associations compete for members. Through the founding of the Confederation of Vocational Unions and the Association of Academic Professions, in the late 1970s, the hegemony of the Confederation as an umbrella association also ended.

Today there is a growing awareness of the membership potential presented by women workers. Part-time employment is, for instance, reflected in a reduced tendency to organize; as part-time workers are mainly women, this constituency is potentially ripe for recruitment. This awareness is accompanied by an atmosphere of growing uneasiness about the Confederation's leadership profile. In the course of the 1980s, therefore, it has become strategically important to foster this atmosphere by connecting internal protests on the issue of representation practices with references to likely outside reactions. At the national convention in 1985, references to the Confederation's general leadership profile were indeed tied explicitly to the growing competition for women members. In response to this increased pressure the convention did accept a quota regulation limited to the composition of internal consultative commissions. But while this decision carried some symbolic value, its practical worth turned out to be less: a later check on the composition of consultative commissions revealed that by the end of 1987 the regulation had not yet been implemented. Faced with new criticism, the leadership chose the easy option: women's representation was increased by raising the total number of commission members by means of supplementary appointments.

At the 1989 national convention, a more visible change in the Confederation's profile was finally achieved. The nominations for the posts of leader and deputy leader were now open, and pressure mounted when the leaders of women-dominated organizations demanded that women candidates should be included. As a consequence, a woman was in due course elected deputy leader of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions. She proceeded immediately to reinstate the issue of women's wages on the Confederation agenda in her speech to the convention.

#### From Movement to Government

In Norway, the integration of women has advanced to the point where a balanced gender representation in the very top political positions is

close to being achieved. As I have argued, this inclusion of women should not be regarded as merely symbolic—as an empty gesture granted by men who have found other ways to hold on to power and privilege. There exists no convincing empirical basis for claims that women have inherited from men positions that are becoming less significant in terms of power and influence. The construction of a myth of women's integration into shrinking institutions only serves to devalue women's struggle to gain equal rights to political participation.

More generally, there is no simple explanation for the success of the campaign for full integration. While a combination of contextual factors, political activism and a specific political culture provided the point of departure, the process can only be understood by reference to, on the one hand, the interplay between new participation claims and traditional principles of political representation, and on the other, the exact conditions under which party competition turned into a mechanism of integration.

This article has maintained a positive interpretation of political integration processes. It has described a situation where relatively sympathetic attitudes on the part of the women's movement towards the state combined with responsiveness within political parties. But this responsiveness—often attributed to firmly held values of equality and justice—has in the Norwegian context primarily been based on party leaderships' gradual acceptance of the political relevance of gender. It is those arguments emphasizing 'difference' that have provided legitimacy to women's claims for representation as a group. From this basis, party competition has so far proved to be an effective mechanism of integration. When gender is acknowledged as a politically relevant issue, the fear of losing women voters helps standardize the representation profiles of the different parties.

At present, several parties guarantee women's representation through formal regulations that specify quotas for elective positions. But gender quotas are not simply the result of a sudden recognition by party leaderships that, since women constitute half the population, such measures are only fair; they are also the product of a particular line of argument that perceives gender to be an important political category needing full representation in its own right. However, such a justification is not itself sufficient to produce equal representation—as demonstrated by the attitude of the Confederation. Arguments here have largely followed those put forward successfully in the party context. Nevertheless, traditional Confederation hegemony over membership has made it difficult to increase pressure by connecting the issue of women's low representation to possible external reactions. Thus a lack of competition during most of the 1970s contributed to keeping women outside the positions of union leadership. Increased competition for membership may now help produce change even in this male bastion.

However, whether or not there will soon be an end to male dominance in unions depends also on the continuation of pressure politics. In

this respect, producing forecasts for the 1990s is difficult. Not much now remains of the feminist alternative of the 1970s. Only one of its three main organizations is still visible. Their magazines no longer exist. The informal women's faction within the Confederation has, effectively, been dissolved. Even the main umbrella association for the traditional women's organizations has recently closed down. When new feminist initiatives occur, they mainly represent single issues. On the other hand, both party and union leaderships, as well as cabinets, parliaments and corporate bodies, now include former movement members who retain their outspoken feminist sympathies. Yet the lingering question of the cost of integration hinges on the value placed on the trade-off: influence for responsibility. That notions of 'change' and 'stability' are embodied, respectively, in terms such as 'movement' and 'government' should not be forgotten.

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## The Ecological Challenge to Marxism

Contemporary Marxism has responded in a number of ways to the challenge posed by ecology. Broadly speaking, three currents of thought can be distinguished.\* The first I shall call the 'Marxist dissident' response. Its proponents have abandoned central elements of Marx's theory, claiming that the new questions posed by ecology cannot be solved within its theoretical framework. The most prominent author here is Rudolf Bahro.<sup>1</sup> Opposed to this group we find a tendency which aims to defend central elements of that theoretical corpus. I shall call this current 'Marxist orthodoxy'.<sup>2</sup> Between them we can locate a third group of authors who think that ecology in fact presents a serious challenge to Marxism, but who are at the same time convinced that ready-made answers are contained within Marx's thought. This position suggests that Marx himself was a Green, albeit a Green *malgré lui*. I think this position amounts to wishful thinking.<sup>3</sup> Ted Benton recently advanced in these pages a reconstruction of historical materialism which incorporates an ecological dimension.<sup>4</sup> His attempt avoids the pitfalls and

lacunae of all the above-mentioned approaches. He asserts that 'there is much in the overall corpus of Marxian historical materialism which is readily compatible with an ecological perspective.'<sup>5</sup> But he also aims to show that historical materialism has to be reformulated and reconstructed. His main concern is to emphasize that Marx, and Engels, did not sufficiently consider the limits that nature imposes on the development of humanity and society.<sup>6</sup> Marx's conception, according to Benton, 'exaggerate[s] the potentially transformative character [of productive labour processes] whilst under-theorizing or occluding the various respects in which they are subject to naturally given and/or relatively non-manipulable conditions and limits.'<sup>7</sup> This, according to Benton, is the main reason for the paradox that 'the basic ideas of historical materialism can without distortion be regarded as a proposal for an ecological approach',<sup>8</sup> while at the same time there exists 'so much bad blood between Marxists and ecologists'.<sup>9</sup> Benton's solution to the paradox emphasizes an ambiguity within Marx's thought: 'My central argument is that there is a crucial hiatus between Marx's and Engels's materialist premisses in philosophy and the theory of history, on the one hand, and some of the basic concepts of their economic theory, on the other.'<sup>10</sup> Most important is Marx's 'insufficiently radical critique' of the leading exponents of classical political economy, with whom he shared and from whom he derived the concepts and assumptions in question.<sup>11</sup>

My own argument here both accepts the fact that there is much bad blood between ecologists and Marxists, and that historical materialism has much to say about ecological problems. Indeed it has even more to say than Benton maintains. I hope to show this without committing the fallacy of wishful thinking. Whilst accepting the stated paradox, I see a different solution to it.

For the sake of conceptual clarity, I shall first give my definition of an ecological problem. I shall then relate Marx's theory to ecological problems in a broader way than Benton does, and consider the claim that Marx held exaggerated views regarding the nature-transformative aspect of human labour. Closely related to this 'Promethean attitude' is the theme of the domination of nature, which I discuss in the next section. I then briefly examine two different notions of alienation

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\* I wish to thank Robin Blackburn, Diane Elson, Norman Geras and Maurice Glasman for their comments and criticism.

<sup>1</sup> See Rudolf Bahro, *From Red to Green*, London 1984.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Ernest Mandel, 'The Generalized Recession of the International Capitalist Economy', *Insprawl*, 16 January 1975.

<sup>3</sup> See Wolf Dietrich Schmied-Kowarzik, *Das Dialektische Verhältnis des Menschen zur Natur. Philosophisch-geschichtliche Studien zur Naturproblematik bei Karl Marx*, Freiburg 1984.

<sup>4</sup> See Ted Benton, 'Marxism and Natural Limits: An Ecological Critique and Reconstruction', *NLR* 178, September–October 1989, pp. 51–86.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71–73.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, my emphasis.



which seem to be helpful for the argument. Finally, I propose an alternative solution to the paradox.

### What is an Ecological Problem?

The definition of ecological problems prefigures their solution in an important way. Similarly, the type of explanation given for them determines both their evaluation and the suggested solutions. But Benton does not offer much in the way of such an analysis; he seems simply to assume that the depletion of resources and population growth are the most pressing problems (at least for Marxist theory). However, as several studies have shown, ecological problems consist of at least the following: (1) pollution (air, water); (2) depletion of groundwater; (3) proliferation of toxic chemicals; (4) proliferation of hazardous waste; (5) erosion; (6) desertification; (7) acidification; (8) new chemicals.<sup>12</sup> In an illuminating but little-discussed book, John Passmore reduces these problems to (i) pollution; (ii) depletion of natural resources; (iii) extinction of species; (iv) destruction of wilderness; (v) population growth.<sup>13</sup>

Since 1, 3, 4, 7 and 8 are contained in the more general category (i), I shall take Passmore's list as the basis for further discussion. Since (iii) and (iv) are contained in (ii), we therefore have basically pollution, depletion of (renewable and non-renewable) resources, and population growth as ecological problems.<sup>14</sup> Population growth can be an ecological problem in two senses. First, it can be seen as leading to pollution or depletion of resources, because an increasing population might require more intense exploitation of raw materials, or greater technological development with pollution as a side-effect. Second, it can be seen as an ecological problem per se, that is, an increasing population in a specific place may be detrimental to human well-being. Thus, taken in the first sense, population growth is a cause of, and taken in the second sense it is an instance of, an ecological problem. Pollution itself compounds the already complex problems generated by depletion of resources and population growth. The challenge to Marxist theory is therefore even stronger than Benton's duality suggests.

Having established what count as ecological problems, we must seek to account for their occurrence. Bringing together explanations from different disciplines such as economic and social theory, we might propose the following list: (a) unintended consequences of human action;<sup>15</sup> (b) technology (with the important subclass of industrial accidents<sup>16</sup>);

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<sup>12</sup> *World Commission on Environment and Nature*, Oxford 1987. This and the following sections draw heavily on my *Marxism and Ecology*, Oxford 1991.

<sup>13</sup> John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, London 1974, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Erosion and desertification fall out of the list. They are natural processes in any case, and interesting in our context only in so far as they are caused by human intervention.

<sup>15</sup> Robert K. Merton, 'The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 1, 1937, pp. 894ff.

<sup>16</sup> See Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents*, New York 1984.

(c) economic growth;<sup>17</sup> (d) externalities;<sup>18</sup> (e) individual rationality that leads to collective irrationality.<sup>19</sup>

No one of these factors in isolation is sufficient to cause an *ecological* problem. Unintended consequences of human action need not lead to such a problem; neither need rational action, externalizing behaviour, economic growth, or the use of technology. They cause ecological problems only in a specific combination or in concert. However, on closer examination, it seems that technology is crucial. It is, as it were, on another logical level than the other factors: the vehicle in and through which ecologically damaging behaviour is embodied and effected.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that, with the exception of some high-risk technology, technology *as such* cannot be considered the cause of ecological problems: some technologies are neutral, some beneficial, and some are detrimental to the natural environment and to human well-being. (For the necessary qualifications, see below.) This has several implications. One is that no simple solution to the problems is available. Since a simple cause-and-effect relationship cannot be established for all ecological problems, it is nearly impossible to eliminate them at source. Another consideration confirms this. Societies have only recently become aware of the critical problem of pollution. This awareness has in some cases led to an obsession with 'cleanness', which seems to suggest that a state of affairs without pollution would be possible.<sup>21</sup> Against such a myth of cleanness we should recall the shrewd comment of Mary Douglas who, albeit in another context, observed that 'uncleanness is matter out of place'.<sup>22</sup> What makes a place wrong is dependent on the cultural value system of a given society. With regard to Western societies we may say that it might be wrong aesthetically, that it is detrimental to health, or that it destroys wildlife.<sup>23</sup> Ecological problems are a feature of modern societies, which they must live and cope with. In the process of coping with them it is likely that the problems will not be abolished completely but only reduced, transformed and displaced. It may also be the case that the cultural forces shaping the perception of these problems will change. Consequently, the definition of what counts as an ecological problem will change.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Some fundamentalist ecologists, such as the German Carl Amery, thus demanded production to stop where possible (see Carl Amery, *Natur als Politik. Die ökologische Chance des Menschen*, Reinbek 1978, p. 167).

<sup>18</sup> Arthur Pigou, *The Economics of Welfare*, London 1932, p. 184.

<sup>19</sup> The famous 'Prisoners' Dilemma'. See, among many, Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge, Mass. 1965, and Amartya Sen, *Choice, Welfare and Measurement*, Oxford 1982.

<sup>20</sup> Commoner expressed a similar view: 'In modern industrial societies, the most important link between society and the ecosystem on which it depends is technology. There is considerable evidence that many of the new technologies which now dominate production in an advanced country such as the United States are in conflict with the ecosystem. They therefore degrade the environment.' (Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle*, London 1971, pp. 178-9.)

<sup>21</sup> See also Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Critique of Political Ecology', *NLR* 84, March-April 1974, pp. 3-31.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, London 1966, p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> See Passmore, pp. 45-6.

<sup>24</sup> Note that this is possible in both directions: what we count today as an ecological problem may disappear simply because the perception of it changes, or new problems emerge which are already latent but not perceived.

## Broadening Historical Materialism

If we relate Marx to these findings, it would seem that he took into account all of the possible 'causes'. He is best known, however, for his stress on the specific capitalist mode of rational private action, which in its limitless drive for increased profit produces 'externalities' and unintended consequences. (This is a secondary point if the major component of ecological problems is in fact unintended or, indeed, at least in part tacitly accepted.) There is no doubt that this formed the essence of Marx's own answer to the ecological problems he witnessed in his own time. As he put it in *Capital*:

[A]ll progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country starts its development on the foundation of modern industry, like the United States, for example, the more rapid is the process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the labourer.<sup>25</sup>

But an explanation of this type is inappropriate, since socialist countries (or non-capitalist enterprises in capitalist economies) produce ecological problems too. However, I shall argue that Marx's analysis remains profound and relevant, and still provides insight into the ecological challenge.

Contrary to Benton, I maintain that a 'broader historical materialism' can in fact be revealed by a conceptual reconstruction of Marx's analysis of the labour process.<sup>26</sup> According to Marx, humankind's existential situation is characterized by the fact that it has to live simultaneously *in* and *against* nature. This is to say that people must stay in contact with nature in order to survive (food, shelter and so forth).<sup>27</sup> But they also *transform* nature for their purposes by means of *technology*. This double relation has developed from simple into complex forms. In primitive societies nature was merely 'appropriated', that is, fruit and vegetables were gathered and animals were hunted. With the advance of technology, this appropriation of nature is no longer a direct one; it becomes mediated. The mediation takes place by means of technology. As Marx put it, 'technology discloses man's mode of dealing with nature.'<sup>28</sup> 'But just as a man requires lungs to breathe with, so he requires something that is the work of man's hand, in order to consume physical forces productively.'<sup>29</sup> Marx calls this process 'metabolism', or 'interchange with nature' (*Stoffwechsel*).<sup>30</sup> If we

<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, London 1974, pp. 474–5, my emphasis. See also *Capital* Volume 1, pp. 257, 398, *Capital* Volume 3, London 1974, p. 813.

<sup>26</sup> Therefore I do not engage in a detailed critique of Benton's criticisms of Marx. Instead, I give an alternative reading.

<sup>27</sup> See *Grundriss*, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 706, where Marx speaks of humankind's 'mastery over nature' and 'participation in nature'.

<sup>28</sup> *Capital* Volume 1, p. 352.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>30</sup> See Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in the Theory of Karl Marx*, London 1971

accept the historical account that technology has developed and that therefore the relationship mankind/nature has become mediated, it seems obvious that a step back to a stage of immediate appropriation of nature is not feasible. The ecological problematic thus has to be tackled on the premiss of a *modern* attitude towards nature. My contention is that Marx's theory offers a great deal to such an understanding.

Yet another point is at issue here. Benton says that Marx overestimates the nature-transformative capacities of the labour process. First, he argues that in 'agricultural labour-processes, by contrast with productive, transformative ones, human labour is not deployed to bring about an intended transformation in a raw material. It is, rather, primarily deployed to sustain or regulate the environmental conditions under which seed or stock animals grow and develop. There is a transformative moment in these labour processes, but the transformations are brought about by naturally-given organic mechanisms, not by the application of human labour.'<sup>31</sup> But Marx certainly was aware of this fact (by chance, Benton quotes Adam Smith, from a citation in *Capital*, in support of his argument). Benton seems to overlook the fact that for Marx human interventions into these natural processes also count as transformative actions, since prepared ground is quite different from untouched nature.<sup>32</sup> I therefore simply cannot see the significant difference between transformative and 'eco-regulatory' labour processes. Benton stresses the fact that all transformative processes have to take place in the face of natural limits and contextual conditions which are 'relatively impervious to intentional manipulation', in some respects even being 'absolutely non-manipulable'. But as far as this argument is concerned, it is rather a question of empirical evidence than of an established fact. For the examples Benton gives (sun radiation, weather manipulation, bio-technology) are open to discussion and to scientific research and technological development.<sup>33</sup> How one evaluates the results of such technologies is another question, but this has nothing to do with the *possibilities* that exist or will exist. Benton seems to define technological possibilities too narrowly because they seem to him *undesirable*. This confusion apart, it is ironic that Benton stresses the rigid character of 'contextual conditions' and 'natural limits' in a world where actual industrial societies explore the possibilities of pushing these barriers further and further back—the substitution of raw materials, development of new synthetic materials, genetic engineering and information technologies being the main examples.

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<sup>31</sup> Benton, p. 67

<sup>32</sup> It is in this sense that he makes fun of Feuerbach, saying that 'untouched nature' does nowhere exist (with the possible exception of some coral islands), see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *MECW*, vol. 5, London 1976, p. 40.

<sup>33</sup> Marx says. 'Mirabeau's "Impossible! Ne me dites jamais ce bête de mot!" is particularly applicable to modern technology' (*Capital* Volume 1, p. 448) He speaks of an ever-increasing productivity of labour together 'with the uninterrupted advance of science and technology' (*Capital* Volume 1, p. 567.) We may find these statements too optimistic and too trustful of scientific technological progress. But they do seem to conform better with the facts of present scientific and technological development.

## The Domination of Nature

It is in the conceptual framework of *Stoffwechsel* that the much discussed (and, of course, often dismissed) concept of the domination of nature has to be located. Technology is the mediating instance without which human beings could not secure their interchange with nature. Marx's approach is essentially based on Hegel: 'As soon as he has to produce, man possesses the resolve to use a part of the available natural objects directly as a means of labour, and, as Hegel correctly said it, subsumes them under his activity without further process of mediation.'<sup>34</sup> And: 'Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature. They are *organs of the human brain, created by the human hand*; the power of knowledge, objectified.'<sup>35</sup>

Marx's concept of nature belongs to a discourse that dates back to Bacon and includes such thinkers as Hegel and Nietzsche.<sup>36</sup> It is this modern view of nature that has long structured philosophical reasoning and that has recently come under attack. As we shall see, Marx did not merely follow Bacon or Hegel, but developed a quite *unique* position, however firmly the 'modern' concept of nature is at its root. Consequently, in discussing Marx's approach, this whole philosophical tradition is involved. A position such as that of fundamentalist ecology, which refutes the Marxian position, thus challenges the entire discourse. One can therefore regard Marx's position as a test case for the integrity of the modern discourse on nature. This is all the more interesting since Marx, in my view, has given the concept 'domination of nature' the most compelling formulation. Two points should be mentioned here: (1) The concept of domination makes sense for Marx only with respect to interests and needs. Recall the example of King Midas who had the power to turn everything he touched into gold. Now this is clearly a self-defeating power, which we would hardly include in a reasonable concept of domination. Likewise, a society that does not take into account the repercussions of its transformation of nature can hardly be said to dominate nature at all. In this version, the usual meaning is reversed. In the usual meaning, ecological crises are perceived to be a result of this very domination of nature. But here they are seen as its *absence*. (2) Marx links the concept of domination of nature to his communist project: for him communism is a state

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<sup>34</sup> *Grundriss*, p. 734.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Cf. Hegel: 'Der Mensch hat Ursache, auf seine Werkzeuge stolz zu sein, denn die Vernunftigkeit ist darin ausgedrückt. Das Werkzeug bildet den *modus terminus*, wodurch die Tätigkeit des Menschen mit der äußeren Natur vermittelt wird. Es ist dies der Geist der Vernunft, daß der Mensch, indem er ein anderes nach außen liebt und abreiben läßt, sich selbst erhält.' (G.W.F. Hegel, in D. Henrich, ed., *Philosophen des Rechts. Die Vorlesung von 1819/20 in einer Nachschrift*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, p. 139.)

<sup>36</sup> From Bacon ('nature is a storehouse of matter'), Hegel ('nature has no immanent purpose'), and Marx ('nature ceases to be recognized as a power for itself'), there is a direct line to Nietzsche ('will to power'). For an exposition of this discourse, and its historical emergence, see William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature*, New York 1972. But unlike the others' shared view that man should make an impact on the world, for Marx this goal is related to the more ambitious goal of controlling all natural and social processes.

of affairs in which human beings are capable (for the first time) of full self-realization. All natural and social conditions are the products of their *common conscious control*. Communism, therefore, is the culmination of a process of increasing mastery over nature.

Marx time and again ridiculed all forms of nature worship and sentimentalism. This position becomes clear when we look at his appraisal of capitalism, in so far as the latter 'creates bourgeois society and the universal appropriation of nature'.<sup>37</sup> In a polemic against the 'true socialists' (in the *German Ideology*) Marx makes fun of a view which sees harmony essentially in nature:

'Man' enters the realm of 'free nature' and utters, among other things, the following tender effusions of a true socialist's heart: ... Gay flowers  
... tall and stately oaks [...] forest birds ... [...] I see [...] that these creatures neither know nor desire any other happiness than that which lies for them in the expression and the enjoyment of their lives.<sup>38</sup>

Marx comments: '“Man” could also observe a great many other things in nature, e.g. the bitterest competition among plants and animals; ... he could further observe that there is open warfare between the “forest birds” and the “infinite multitude of tiny creatures”'.<sup>39</sup> Another example of Marx's fierce rejection of any 'nature cult' is in his polemic against Daumer, where he comments on the following passages from *Die Religion des neuen Weltalters*: 'Nature and woman are really divine, as distinct from the human and man ... The sacrifice of the human to the natural, of the male to the female, is the genuine, the only true meekness and self-externalization, the highest, nay, the only virtue and piety.'<sup>40</sup> Daumer then cites Stolberg's poem 'An die Natur': 'Nature holy, Mother sweet,/ In Thy footsteps place my feet./ My baby hand to Thy hand clings,/ Hold me as in leading strings!' and comments: 'Such things have gone out of fashion, but not to the benefit of culture, progress or human felicity.'<sup>41</sup> Now look at Marx's outrage:

Herr Daumer's cult of nature ... is a peculiar one. He manages to be reactionary even in comparison with Christianity. He tries to restore the old pre-Christian natural religion in a modernized form ... We see that this cult of nature is limited to the Sunday walks of an inhabitant of a small provincial town who childishly wonders at the cuckoo laying eggs in another bird's nest ... at tears being designed to keep the surface of the eyes moist ... and so on ... There is no mention, of course, of *modern natural science, which, with modern industry, has revolutionized the whole of nature and put an end to man's childish attitude towards nature* as well as to other forms of childishness. But instead we get mysterious hints and astonished philistine notions about Nostradamus' prophecies, second sight in Scotsmen and animal magnetism. For the rest, it would be desirable that Bavaria's sluggish peasant economy, the ground on which grow priests and Daumers alike, should at last be ploughed up by modern cultivation and modern machines.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Grundriss*, p. 409.

<sup>38</sup> *MECW*, vol. 5, p. 471.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *MECW*, vol. 10, p. 244.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *MECW*, vol. 10, p. 245, my emphasis

Instead of this sentimental notion of nature, Marx praises Hobbes and Hegel for their realistic view: 'Hobbes had much better reasons for invoking nature as a proof of his *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and Hegel, on whose construction our true socialist depends, for perceiving in nature this cleavage, the slovenly period of the Absolute Idea, and even calling the animal the concrete anguish of God.'<sup>43</sup> What is interesting here is that Marx attacks an argument about nature which is also present in contemporary ecological discourse. Marx's polemic seems to have been written directly against some ecological fundamentalist: 'The true socialist proceeds from the thought that the dichotomy of life and happiness must cease. To prove this thesis he summons the aid of nature presupposing that this dichotomy does not exist in nature and from this he deduces that since man, too, is a natural body and has the properties which bodies generally possess, this dichotomy ought not to exist for him either.'<sup>44</sup>

Benton correctly summarizes and interprets a passage from Engels's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* and comments: '[I]n earlier stages of history, humans have suffered a doubly conditioned lack of autonomy. In so far as their transformative powers vis-à-vis nature have been limited in their development, they have been at the mercy of, dominated by, the forces of external nature. But superimposed upon this source of domination has been another, rooted in society itself, experienced as a "second nature". With the historical development of human social powers vis-à-vis nature there arises the possibility that the tables can be turned with respect to both sources of oppression: humans can acquire communal control over their own social life, and through that, over nature itself.'<sup>45</sup> But Benton is critical of this perspective. He continues: 'But if the acquisition of human autonomy presupposes control over nature, this suggests an underlying antagonism between human purposes and nature: either we control nature, or it controls us! No room, apparently, for symbiosis, peaceful co-existence, mutual indifference or other imaginable metaphors for this relationship.'<sup>46</sup>

As far as the use of the phrase 'domination of nature' is concerned, there seems to be nothing wrong with it if it denotes 'conscious control'. In this sense we speak of 'taming' a river, or of taming wild animals. To take another example: imagine a musician who plays her instrument with virtuosity. We call her play 'masterly'; in German one would say '*sie beherrscht ihr Instrument*'. It is in this sense that we have to understand the domination of nature. It does not mean that one behaves in a reckless fashion towards it, any more than we suggest that a masterly player dominates her instrument (say a violin) when she hits it with a hammer.

### Anthropocentrism versus Ecocentrism

I take it that the anthropocentric view lends itself naturally to such a

<sup>43</sup> *ALSCW*, vol. 5, p. 473.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>45</sup> Benton, p. 75.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*

reading. Non-anthropocentric views often (and typically) refuse all talk about 'mastery of nature'. But such reasoning gets the matter wrong. As a defender of anthropocentrism, the American philosopher Bryan Norton correctly observed that environmentalists often fall prey to two typical confusions. The first is the belief that one must choose between attributing intrinsic or instrumental value to an object—that no object can be valued for its intrinsic value and simultaneously for its usefulness. The second is the belief that one must either attribute intrinsic value to an object, or else leave it without any protection from the vagaries of human consumptive demands. Such beliefs sometimes lead to the confusion that the protection of nature on anthropocentric grounds is a contradiction in terms.

As regards the first belief, Norton rightly contends that 'one can assign instrumental value to an object without automatically denying that it has value beyond that usefulness . . . Attributing intrinsic value to an object limits the *ways* in which that object can be used, but need not prohibit all use of it.'<sup>47</sup> As regards the second belief, Norton shows this to be wrong as well. A simple analogy makes this clear: 'One need not attribute intrinsic value to a neighbour's property in order to have a good reason not to destroy it. Nor need one attribute intrinsic value to nature in order to have good reason not to use it destructively.'<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, from an instrumental view of nature thus understood, one can derive a rationale for the protection of species which is again anthropocentric. One might believe that humans who protect rather than destroy other living things are less likely to be violent in their dealings with other humans. To quote another example from Norton, one should, therefore, value wild birds, for example, 'as providing occasions for the uplifting of human attitudes and values'.<sup>49</sup>

The anthropocentric approach has the main virtue of offering a reference point from which to evaluate ecological problems. This, as we shall see, can be defined in different ways (currently living human individuals, society, mankind, future generations); but no matter how we define it, it firmly establishes a clear criterion of how to judge existing ecological phenomena. Any 'ecocentric' approach, on the other hand, is bound to be inconsistent, unless it adopts a mystical standpoint. It is inconsistent because it pretends to define ecological problems purely from the standpoint of nature. It starts with assumptions about nature and natural laws to which all human action should adapt. Note that the refusal of anthropocentrism is followed by a conspicuous position which anthropomorphizes nature; that is, it projects human standards and inventions into the working of nature. But why should nature work in a 'balanced' manner? Or why should nature always be beautiful? Is it not humankind that introduces laws of beauty into nature? Marx, in the *Paris Manuscripts*, put it thus: 'Man forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty.'<sup>50</sup> It seems

<sup>47</sup> Bryan G. Norton, *Why Preserve Natural Variety?*, Princeton 1987, p. 219.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Norton, p. 221.

<sup>50</sup> *MECW*, vol. 3, p. 277.



evident, therefore, that the definition of 'nature's nature' and of ecological balance is a human (and, therefore, a social) act, a human definition which sets an ecological balance in relation to social needs, pleasures and desires. If we characterize human beings as living in, and dominating, nature, this does not produce two incompatible statements. When we term ecological a problem that arises as a consequence of society's dealings with nature, many might agree. But I think it is useful to push the point further. It does not mean that the very fact of dealing with nature (manipulation, domination, harnessing or inducing) is the crucial point, the 'cause', so to speak, of ecological problems. Ecological problems arise only from *specific* ways of dealing with nature. To repeat my earlier claim: both society's existence in nature and its attempt to dominate nature are compatible; human beings do indeed live in, and dominate, nature.<sup>21</sup>

By their misunderstanding of this relation, both ecologists and their declared enemies maintain the mutually exclusive character of the two predicates. Consider the following argument which takes the ecocentric approach to extremes, thereby revealing its absurdity. It is difficult to know what is 'normal' for nature. Ecologists will probably argue that the 'normal' state of nature is one of balance. Since I cannot see how this definition makes sense without reference to human interests and definitions, I maintain that nature is always in 'balance with itself'. Take the example of a river in which, due to pollution (detergents), no fish can survive. But instead of fish, other animals and plants (for example, algae) are flourishing. The ecologist, confronted with such an argument, would probably say that if the river cannot return to the former ('normal') state under its own powers, its ecosystem would have to be called 'unbalanced'. But in so arguing, she would only reveal her preference for higher living organisms. Lower animals such as insects and bacteria are usually outside the concern of ecological reasoning. (Albert Schweitzer tried to be consistent and defended the right of living for the tsetse fly and the tubercle. This position, radical in ethical and religious respects, makes a consistent course of human action impossible. Consider the case of the AIDS virus!)

Let us again take the argument a step further and consider the example of a river that is drying out. In this case we once more have 'nature', in the form of sand, rocks, plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, mammals. The ecologist would probably maintain that nature's diversity and complexity were being destroyed. And here, ironically, we have the re-emergence (if only implicit) of the anthropocentric view: namely, that it is man who has an interest in conserving natural complexity. Now an adherent to the ecocentric view could argue that

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<sup>21</sup> If someone were to criticize the concept of 'domination' of nature because of its odd connotations, we could reply with this reflection by Walter Benjamin: 'The mastery of nature, so the imperialists teach, is the purpose of all technology. But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the purpose of education? Is not education above all the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery, if we are to use this term, of that relationship and not of children? And likewise technology is not the mastery of nature but of the relation between nature and man' (Walter Benjamin, 'One-Way Street', in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, London 1979, p. 104.)

nature 'for itself' should be complex. But, unless one adopts a mystical or religious standpoint, there is always a human interest behind the attitude that nature should be left out there 'for itself'. The motives behind such a human interest are either of an aesthetic or a purely selfish character, or they spring from humanity's general care about its environment. If we do not conceive of the 'selfish' motive in a narrow, economic, short-term way, then all criteria can be reduced to this category. My suspicion is that the discourse of ecology has shaped its arguments in a counter-position to economics, and also has taken over a basic flaw of that theory, namely the identification of short-term rationality (as expressed in economic behaviour) with rationality as such. As a result of this identification, it is only logical to refuse an anthropocentric approach as a guide to solving ecological problems: human beings are seen as inherently shortsighted; it follows that their needs should not count as criteria for ecological politics. Doing away with this confusion, the anthropocentric standpoint makes perfectly possible a concern about the 'flourishing of nature'; it is by no means bound to be an accomplice to the tendencies that cause ecological problems. Yet, what is more, I maintain that this standpoint is the only one able to speak consistently in terms like 'flourishing nature', and the only one which lays its mode of critique open, thus facilitating analyses and solutions for these problems.

### Versions of Nature

In a recent study of contemporary ecological thought, Mechthild Oechsle found naturalism to be the prevalent viewpoint. Naturalism, according to her, proceeds in the following way. It first juxtaposes nature and society; they are seen as standing in contradiction to each other. It then tries to solve this contradiction in such a way that society adapts its laws to those of nature. 'Naturalism means to attempt to explain society from the viewpoint of the laws of nature, to derive organizing principles of society and norms of social life from ecological principles.'<sup>32</sup> Haeckel (who coined the term 'ecology' to denote the science which analyses the relationships of organisms to their environment) had already claimed that humankind should lead its life in accordance with natural laws. It is intriguing to learn that this naturalistic worldview is common to all political tendencies in the discourse of ecology. We find it in conservative authors like Gruhl;<sup>33</sup> in Stalinist-Communist authors like Harich;<sup>34</sup> in anarchist writers like Bookchin;<sup>35</sup> and in eco-socialist writers like Lalonde.<sup>36</sup> All claim the authority of nature and her laws to be the foundation stone of a new society that will solve ecological problems. Gruhl and Harich are alike in that they stress the iron necessity with which nature operates;

<sup>32</sup> Mechthild Oechsle, *Der ökologische Naturalismus*, Frankfurt 1988; p. 9, my translation.

<sup>33</sup> Herbert Gruhl, *Ein Planet wird geplündert*, Frankfurt am Main 1975, pp. 33, 345.

<sup>34</sup> Wolfgang Harich, *Kommunismus ohne Wachstum? Babesf und der Club of Rome*, Reinbek 1975.

<sup>35</sup> Murray Bookchin, *Die Formen der Freiheit. Aufsätze über Ökologie und Anarchismus*, Telgte-Westbevern 1977, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Brice Lalonde, 'Kurze Abhandlung über die Ökologie', in C. Leggewie and R. de Mille, eds, *Der Wälfische Ökologebewegung in Frankreich*, Berlin 1978.

from this they derive similar tough political measures. Bookchin argues that spontaneity in life converges with spontaneity in nature,<sup>57</sup> and Lalonde stresses the fact that nature is, and society should be, self-organizing. 'Nature', then, seems to be an uncontested authority. However, closer analysis shows each version of nature to be a construction of its author. Consequently, the 'nature of nature' is a matter rather of debate than certainty.

It is thus clear that any discourse on nature and ecological problems is not without presuppositions; and these presuppositions lie within the cultural background of the participants of the discourse—they are a product of history. A definition of 'nature' or of ecological problems, therefore, always relates to an anthropocentric element. Oechsle, for example, rightly defends humanity's special position within nature; and she rightly refuses to accept ecological naturalism. However, her ambivalence towards anthropocentrism leads to an ambiguous defence of it. To repeat: in my view, humanity's special position within nature is characterized by its *domination of nature*. In order to separate the question of whether humanity has a special status within nature from the question of whether it should dominate nature, Oechsle (approvingly) cites Mumford, who claimed that within occidental civilization there have been examples of a 'democratic' technology. This argument allows her to defend a sort of anthropocentrism without having to embrace the notion of domination of nature. However, a distinction between a democratic and an authoritarian technology makes sense only with respect to humanity, not with respect to nature. Every technology, even the softest, forms a part of humanity's domination of nature.<sup>58</sup> Oechsle agrees with authors like Amery, Bahro and Meyer-Abich that we have to research the origins of the destruction of nature. These are seen in the specific occidental human self-understanding and worldview. As Amery puts it: 'We have to lay bare the roots of these historical and ideal attitudes in order to initiate the painful process of a planetary revolution . . . If one forgets these roots, all necessary proposals will meet political and social resistance; and only if we become aware how deep these roots reach into our collective unconscious, will the attempt succeed.'<sup>59</sup> But this 'planetary revolution' seems to be something of a utopian project; some might consider it even quite dangerous. Therefore, I think it is worthwhile to investigate the possibilities that a *modern* approach to the problematic offers us.

Human beings have no fixed place where they must live; virtually every place on this planet can be inhabited by them. By this they distinguish themselves from most other animals (and, of course, plants) which survive only within a limited geographical, biological, climatic zone. How are human beings able to survive in an 'insecure

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<sup>57</sup> Bookchin, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Oechsle comes close to acknowledging this when she writes that even the most 'dialogical' approaches towards nature (as, for example, proposed by Prigogine) cannot but lead to a more perfect domination of nature. In Trepl's words, 'Ecological technology is total control. For this reason ecology is not outside the logic of progress, but progress culminates in it.' (Ludwig Trepl, 'Ökologie eine grüne Leitwissenschaft? Über Grenzen und Perspektiven einer modernen Disziplin', *Karsbuch* 74, 1983.)

<sup>59</sup> Amery, cited in Oechsle, pp. 96–7, my translation.

environment'? The answer is: by constructing a second 'nature' around themselves.<sup>60</sup> This artificial, human-made nature is the embodiment of their necessity to fight against nature; it is the solution of the apparent contradiction that they are in and against nature. But something further follows from this. Because human beings organize their lives in the described way, they have no 'natural enemies', in contradistinction to all other species. However, there are times when they are opposed by specific elements of nature; nature exerts its resistance upon them. As John Stuart Mill observed, the powers of nature 'are often towards man in the position of enemies, from which he must wrest, by force and ingenuity, what little he can for his own use.'<sup>61</sup>

Nature, as such, is not always beneficial to human beings. It is completely mistaken to identify nature with 'good', and technology or human culture with 'bad'.<sup>62</sup> Moralizing rarely helps. As Passmore has rightly observed, 'these natural processes may in fact be quite harmful; so that, let us say, oysters from granite regions ought to be condemned for human consumption. The "natural" is not necessarily harmless, let alone beneficial to man.'<sup>63</sup> In exactly the same vein, Adorno, reflecting on the landscape of the Swiss Alps, remarked: 'Both the scars of civilization and the untouched zone beyond the timber line are contrary to the idea that nature is cheering and warming, dedicated only to man; they reveal what the cosmos looks like. The usual image of nature is limited, narrowly bourgeois, sensitive only to the tiny space in which historically familiar life flourishes; the bridle path is philosophy of culture.'<sup>64</sup> And again Passmore, in reply to Barry Commoner's 'Third law of ecology—nature knows best', pointed out:

It is true enough . . . that every human intervention in an ecosystem is likely to disturb the workings of that system in a way that is detrimental to some member of it. So much is true of every change, man-induced or nature-induced. But it by no means follows, as his 'law' might seem to suggest, that every such change, or even most of such changes, will be detrimental to human beings. Unlike the watches to which he compares them, ecological systems were not designed for man's use. When men picked seeds off plants and sowed them on cleared ground they acted in a way that was detrimental to the organic life which was accustomed to feed on the fallen seeds. But only the most unreconstructed primitivist would suggest that the actions of our agricultural forefathers were destructive of human interests. A nature left entirely alone as 'knowing best' would support only the dreariest and most monotonous of lives.<sup>65</sup>

The specific twist that Marx adds to the topic is, however, open to

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<sup>60</sup> In comparison, an animal species in an unfavourable environment will undergo an evolutionary process in order to survive.

<sup>61</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, London 1904, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> As Kluge has shown in a detailed study, much of the ecological rhetoric consists of the juxtaposition of *life* and *death*—where nature stands for the former, industrialism for the latter. (See Thomas Kluge *Gesellschaft, Natur, Technik*, Opladen 1985.)

<sup>63</sup> Passmore, p. 47.

<sup>64</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Aus Sils Maria', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 10.1, Frankfurt am Main, 1968, p. 327, my translation.

<sup>65</sup> Passmore, p. 185.

criticism, albeit not to a criticism endorsed by Benton. The reason why Marx's outline is problematic lies in the epistemological position that humans could understand the world they created much better than the world that is naturally given. This *verum idem factum* principle was inherited by Marx from Vico.<sup>66</sup> According to Vico, nature is a product of God and thus only intelligible to him; culture, on the other hand, is a product of man and thus intelligible to him. However, this thought poses serious theoretical problems for Marx. One of them is that he does not reckon with the possibility that human objectifications, such as modern social relations, may become so complex that they are no longer susceptible to everyone's understanding. Marx thought—along the lines of paragraph 4 of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*—that the more people transform first nature into second nature, the more they would become masters of their fate. And this is the real core and the ultimate source of motivation for Marx's critique. It is the *humanist* conviction that everything that impinges upon human dignity must be submitted to theoretical criticism and practical obviation. The theme of conscious control over human affairs is thus the Archimedean point from which Marx levels his critique of capitalism (but, also, of earlier modes of production). It is from this point that he derives his *normative* perspective of what a communist society should look like. In the first place it should be a society that institutionalizes conscious human control over its fate. And it is this that informs his evaluation of former and existing modes of production. Most instructive in this respect is the opening chapter of *Capital* Volume I, section 4, where Marx discusses the 'Fetish Character of Commodities and Its Secret'. Marx says that people in the ancient world were governed by the product of their brains (that is, religion), whereas in the modern world they are governed by the products of their hands. Both states of affairs are unworthy of human dignity. This is the reason why Marx, throughout his work, put so much stress on the topic of alienation, reification and fetishism. Capitalism was not only criticized for its poor economic performance, which shows up in economic crises; it was not only criticized because it exploited the workers;<sup>67</sup> but also because it reduced the workers to *slaves*, making them dependent on a system of wage-slavery,<sup>68</sup> and prevented them achieving self-realization.<sup>69</sup> But, likewise, capitalists are also caught in a situation unworthy of their human nature: even if they are better off than the workers, they cannot control the aggregate outcome of their actions on the world market. Thus they fear the repercussions of their own behaviour, in much the same way that the primitive feared nature.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> See *Capital* Volume I, p. 352 n. 2. See also Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, London 1976.

<sup>67</sup> A topic of considerable controversy. See the debate in M. Cohen, T. Nagel and T. Scanlon, *Marx, Justice and History*, Princeton 1980; and the excellent review of these and other contributions in Norman Geras, 'The Controversy about Marx and Justice', in *Literature of Revolution: Essays on Marxism*, London 1986.

<sup>68</sup> See the incisive analysis in Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, Oxford 1987.

<sup>69</sup> For this 'expressive' notion of labour in Marx, see Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge 1975.

<sup>70</sup> It would be interesting to ask whether the topic of alienation only makes sense on the basis of methodological individualism (See Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, Cambridge 1985) or if it rather points to structural or systemic features.

## Alienation in Marx

I believe that this humanist model still has an important place in any critical project of social, political and philosophical theory.<sup>71</sup> And, significantly for the present argument, it also has a direct bearing on the ecological problematic. For if modern societies are threatened by their own transformation of nature, the above analysis by Marx is applicable. If we take it as given that technology stands at the heart of the matter, we gain an even greater understanding of it *on the basis of Marx's own thought*; the reason being that Marx, in the *Grundrisse* and the *Manuskripte* of 1861–63, employs a *double notion of alienation*.

The first conception of alienation is well known and needs no elaboration here. It is that alienation in capitalism is a social phenomenon that arises on the basis of commodity production (which is, above all, value production), under the conditions of private production and markets. With the abolition of capitalism, so the argument goes, alienation will also vanish.

But there is a second conception implicit in the notion of alienation. Marx also employs the concept in the analysis of technology; that is, at the level of the labour process, not only at the level of the process of valorization. Since his main concepts in the theoretical framework of the *Critique of Political Economy* have a dual character—commodity as the unity of use-value/exchange-value; labour as the unity of concrete and abstract labour; mode of production as the unity of productive forces and relations of production—it could be the case that symptoms of alienation can be detected at the level of use-value. Marx develops this thought with respect to capitalist machinery. In the ten years preceding the publication of *Capital*, Marx struggled with the problem of how to *evaluate* capitalist machine technology. On the one hand, he was convinced that the development of the productive forces was an objective, unfolding process that would lead to the advent of communist society. On the other hand, he saw the reality of the capitalist labour process, which—to a large degree—was determined by the use of machinery that degraded, crippled and deprived the workers.<sup>72</sup> This latter observation ran counter to Marx's conception of the good life, to his conviction that human beings are creative and should expand their self-realizing capacities.

Past labour confronts the worker in the form of an automaton moving a

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<sup>71</sup> I cannot develop here the limits of this model, which have to be seen in its close affiliation with the theory of the subject, with Marx's (and Hegel's) hope to bring about a final reconciliation in history. For a critique, see Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study in the Foundations of Critical Theory*, New York 1986; also Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Cambridge 1988. But in a weak sense we nonetheless can use the model as a *regulative idea*, that is, to reduce all obstacles to human self-realization. See also Iring Fettscher, 'Aufklärung über Aufklärung', in A. Honneth, T. McCarthy, C. Offe and A. Wellmer, eds., *Zwischenbetrachtungen im Prozeß der Aufklärung. Jürgen Habermas zum 60. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, pp. 657–89.

<sup>72</sup> Maxine Berg, *The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy*, Cambridge 1982.

machine, apparently autonomous from labour, self-acting. Instead of being subordinated to labour, it subordinates labour, the iron man against the man of flesh and blood. The subordination of his work under capital . . . which is already given with the concept of capitalist production, appears here as a technological fact. The keystone is ready. Dead labour endowed with movement, and living labour only existing as one of its conscious organs.<sup>73</sup>

Marx conceived of the development of technologies and social relations within an evolutionary perspective:<sup>74</sup> a new social formation or a new productive force emerges out of a prior formation.<sup>75</sup> The old is pregnant with the new, to paraphrase a metaphor Marx was fond of. But this model poses a dilemma in the case of technology (and, of course, the labour process): either the liberating form of technology is already present under capitalism, in which case the evolutionary scheme coincides with the normative orientation; or it has not yet developed and can thus be nothing but a *desideratum* for communist society.<sup>76</sup> The latter position was an impossible one for Marx to take, since this would amount to an *idealistic* hope for a better future. His solution to the dilemma is, therefore, to attribute all negative aspects of machine technology to its capitalist *use*, and to attribute all positive aspects to machine technology *as such*.

No matter how we view this theoretical trick, it enables us to solve the dilemma in a satisfactory way. That is to say that technology, in so far as it has a detrimental impact on the natural environment (and also on human beings), has to be changed and replaced by a technology that meets the criteria that it be consciously controlled and worthy of human nature. At the same time, as I indicated above, the view that capitalism is the main cause of ecological problems must be abandoned. Communism, understood in the sense of a rational society that allows for human self-realization, and exercises conscious control over its fate, would thus not in the first place require the abolition of private property and the installation of a centrally planned economy, as orthodox Marxism maintained. It would direct its attention to a wider range of phenomena than those Marx was explicitly dealing with in *Capital* (that is, value theory, crisis theory, class theory, theory of revolution). Nevertheless, the method and criteria of this critique are

<sup>73</sup> *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie. Manuskript 1861–63*, in *MEGA*, II.3.6, Berlin 1982, pp. 2057–8, my translation. Marx's formulation in the *Grundrisse* is similar: '[I]t is the machinery which possesses skill and strength, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own . . . The workers' activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of machinery and not the opposite.' (*Grundrisse*, p. 693; see also p. 529 n., 585, 704.)

<sup>74</sup> See Reiner Grundmann, *Marxism and Ecology*, Oxford 1991.

<sup>75</sup> See Karl Marx, *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*.

<sup>76</sup> Moore argues convincingly that in Marx there is a cleavage between his historical materialism and his philosophical humanism. Thus, whereas Benton perceives the tension to be between Marx's historical materialism and his economic theory, Moore argues that Marx is unable to derive the principles of 'humanist communism' from the basis of his 'scientific' historical materialism alone (Stanley Moore, *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism*, Cambridge, Mass 1980.) See also G. A. Cohen, 'Reconsidering Historical Materialism', in J. Pennock and J. W. Chapman, eds, *Marxism: Newer xxvi*, New York 1983, p. 227.

still present in such an approach. Marx's own interest in the history of technology should stimulate similar research by contemporary Marxists and critical social scientists.<sup>77</sup>

To return to the original paradox: why, given the apparent congruence of the basic ideas of historical materialism with the ecological approach, is there so much bad blood between Marxists and Greens? In my view the answer has to be sought in the theme of the domination of nature. Greens dismiss the Promethean attitude towards nature as the cause of all evil, and plead for a new, harmonious relationship with nature. They favour a re-enchantment of the world<sup>78</sup> and the development of an ecological ethics.<sup>79</sup> Some extreme ecological fundamentalists even argue for a radical break with the modern approach towards nature, a return to modes of a 'simpler life'. Even granted that such a jump backwards might be possible (which I deny) or desirable (which I leave open), it would cause considerable social tensions that might outweigh by far the hypothetical 'gains' of an ecologically 'embedded' life.

As far as such approaches are concerned, I simply affirm that Marx's formulation of the modern relationship to nature is, with some qualifications, still superior to romantic dreams about a completely new relationship. Between nature and humankind there can be no harmony; the appropriate forms of transforming nature must be set and defined by *historically existing human cultures*.<sup>80</sup> I therefore do not believe that the paradox should be explained away by an insufficient recognition of natural limits on Marx's side. The conflict is deeper than this. Benton's solution of the paradox is thus found wanting on three counts. First, he generally reduces ecological problems to problems of natural limits, which blinds him to the greater variety of ecological problems—namely, pollution and its manifold causes. Second, in thus reducing the problem, he understates the real issues at stake between Marxists and environmentalists. But third, and most worrying, Benton himself seems to fall prey to a form of ecological reasoning in which he criticizes Marxism for adopting a Promethean attitude towards nature. It is ironic that Benton claims that Marx has become a victim of a spontaneous ideology of the nineteenth century, namely, industrialism and progress,<sup>81</sup> for he himself seems to be the victim of a spontaneous ideology of the late twentieth century—ecological romanticism.

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<sup>77</sup> The history and sociology of technology are young academic disciplines. But see the recent contributions in W. Bijker, T. Hughes and T. Pinch, *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*, Cambridge, Mass. 1987, and Peter Weingart, ed., *Technik als sozialer Prozess*, Frankfurt am Main 1989. See also Nathan Rosenberg, 'Marx as a Student of Technology', in *Inside the Black Box: Technology and Economics*, Cambridge 1982.

<sup>78</sup> The title of an article by Serge Moscovici, in A. Touraine, ed., *Jenseits der Krise. Wider das politische Defizit der Ökologie*, Frankfurt am Main 1976.

<sup>79</sup> See Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Chicago 1984.

<sup>80</sup> I cannot discuss the question of future generations here; see Joel Feinberg, 'The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations', in *Rights, Justice, and the Bounds of Liberty. Essays in Social Philosophy*, Princeton 1980; Passmore, 1974.

<sup>81</sup> Benton, p. 76.



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## *The Vacuum in Hungarian Politics: Classes and Parties*

In February 1989 the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárti* or MSZMP) formally accepted the principles of multi-party democracy.\* Within thirteen months of this decision, free elections were held and a complex political system emerged in which six parties came to represent distinct political fields in parliament. This period offers a fascinating study of political institution-building and sophisticated coalition politics. The aim of this article is to analyse these emergent political fields: to identify the principal issues around which they are organized, the political constituencies on which they draw, the way in which actors competing for these fields emerge, and the process by which their struggle unfolds. Our empirical observations are confined mainly to Hungary, but our conclusions might well have wider application within Central Europe. The main thrust of our argument is that during the post-Communist transition in Central Europe three different political fields developed: the liberal, the Christian-nationalist (centre-right), and the social-democratic. The Hungarian elections in March–April 1990 produced an impressive victory for the Christian-nationalist parties. With the

exception of Czechoslovakia (where the victorious Civil Forum is on the liberal side of the political spectrum, and opted rather than was forced into coalition with the Christian Democrats), this seems to be the dominant trend in the entire non-Balkan region of Central Europe. The hegemonic forces are of a Christian-nationalist type in East Germany, Poland, Croatia, and Slovenia.<sup>1</sup>

In Hungary, the Christian-nationalist field is made up of several political parties: the nationalist Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum* or MDF), the petty-bourgeois Independent Small-holders' Party (*Független Kisgazdapárt* or FKGP), and the conservative Christian Democratic Party (*Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt* or KDNP). Despite some differences in their political programmes, these parties have combined to form a coalition government. Together they hold almost 60 per cent of the seats in parliament. The liberals are represented by the Alliance of Free Democrats (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége* or SZDSZ) and the Alliance of Young Democrats (*Fiatalkorú Demokraták Szövetsége* or FIDESZ). Between them, these two parties polled one third of all votes cast and, for this reason alone, constitute the main source of opposition to the government. Finally, the political Left in Hungary is represented by the Hungarian Socialist Party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt* or MSZP). It is constituted by the reform wing of the old Communist Party and, because of its relatively poor performance in the elections, holds less than 10 per cent of all seats in the current parliament. It is interesting to note that, in spite of such variation in the political orientation of the different parties, not a single organization has come forward to represent the social-democratic field in Hungary.

It might be argued that the outcome of the elections was not a surprise in that it reflected a return to the political traditions of the region. Such reasoning has, in fact, inspired at least one American commentator to label the current transformation of Central Europe as a *conservative revolution*<sup>2</sup>—an argument not without historical support. In Hungary, for example, democratic elections prior to the establishment of the socialist regime repeatedly produced centre-right victories: in

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<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that the 'eastern region' of Central Europe (represented by Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia) followed a different road to post-Communism. As late as October 1990, countries in this region were still governed either by Communists or successors of the old Communist elite. Such differences in the developmental trajectories of the two regions may be coincidental. At the same time, we cannot help but be impressed by the uncanny contiguity of these patterns of development with the long-standing division in this region along the lines of Western and Eastern Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> This statement was made by the President of the American Council of Learned Societies at a conference in Budapest in the summer of 1990.

1945 the Smallholders' Party (*Kisgazdapárt*) won 57 per cent of the vote; in 1938 the Party of Hungarian Life (*Magyar Élet Pártja*) won 70 per cent of the vote; and in 1906 the Independence Party (*Függetlenségi Párt*) gained 62 per cent of all seats in parliament.<sup>3</sup> A glance at election results from the past might suggest that embedded in Hungarian political culture is a strong taste for Christian-nationalist political rule.

In the course of the past few months, political commentators attempting to predict the outcome of events were in the position of an audience seated in a theatre with the curtain still down. What, they wondered, was in preparation after forty years of Communist rule? Astonishingly, as the curtain was raised, the audience was confronted with a still life: the 'act' that was interrupted forty years ago with the transition to socialism seemed to have resumed, as if nothing had happened in between.

Given the success of the centre-right in pre-socialist elections, one might have anticipated the historical pendulum moving rightward after decades of *left-wing deviations*. Such expectations notwithstanding, we believe that the restoration of prewar politics in Hungary requires an explanation. During the past forty years, after all, Hungarian society has undergone fundamental changes. For example, the peasantry and the genteel middle class, which have formed the usual social base for centre-right political forces in the past, were virtually eliminated under the socialist regime.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the postwar industrialization of the Hungarian economy created a large industrial proletariat and, along with this, the emergence of a social-democratic field. In the light of such changes, one would have expected to see a general weakening of the traditional centre-right and a strengthening of social-democratic sentiment in this period. Surprisingly, however, the outcome of the March–April elections produced the opposite result. How are we to account for the exceptionally poor predictive power of structural factors and the apparent continuity of political culture? It is intended to shed some light on this apparent paradox in the following discussion.

### Post-Communist Hungary: Class Structure and Political Fields

The class structure of post-Communist Hungary assumes a tri-polar form. As indicated in Figure 1, the main distinctions are between professionals, proprietors and workers. This mapping of the class structure has its origins in the old socialist regime. In the established model of socialism the state had a monopoly over the organization of economic life. Class differences were characterized by a single hierarchy of positions in which the old Communist (cadre) elite was at the top and the working class at the bottom.<sup>5</sup> With the gradual erosion of

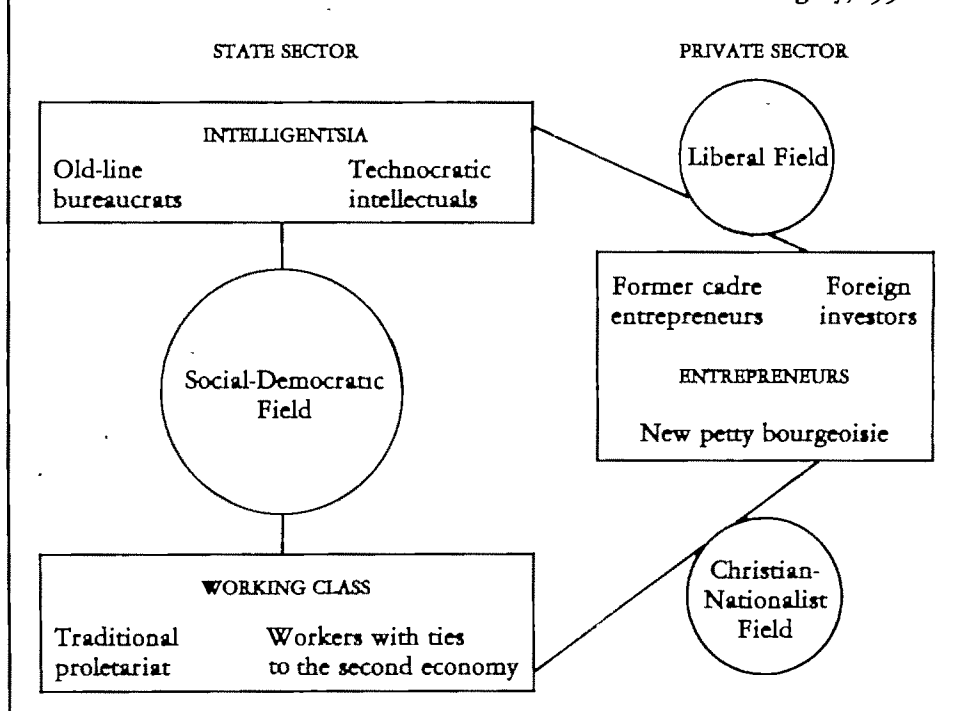
<sup>3</sup> Gyula Benda, *Magyarország Történeti Kronológiája* (The Chronological History of Hungary), Budapest 1983, pp. 810, 934, 1023.

<sup>4</sup> Róbert Manchin and Iván Szelényi, 'Theories of Family Agricultural Production in Collectivized Economies', *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol. xxv, no. 3/4, 1985, p. 260.

<sup>5</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman, 'Officialdom and Class: Basis of Inequality in Socialist Society', in Frank Parkin, ed., *The Social Analysis of Class Structures*, London 1974, George Konrad and Iván Szelényi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, New York 1979; Iván Szelényi, 'Prospects and Limits of the New Class Project in Eastern Europe',

central management, this pyramidal organization was complemented by a second hierarchy of occupations, based on market integration.<sup>6</sup> In this second order, vertical mobility was determined by ownership of wealth and entrepreneurial skills. Not surprisingly, therefore, owners and entrepreneurs were located at the apex of the hierarchy and waged workers at the bottom.

Figure I.  
The Class Structure and Political Fields in Post-Communist Hungary, 1990



Following the events of 1989, Central European societies began a swift but arduous journey towards the market economy. At the current stage in their development it would be premature to designate them as fully fledged capitalist societies. They are best characterized as socialist mixed economies in which the state continues to dominate economic life but wherein the private sector plays a stronger and more complementary role. In spite of the continued hegemonic role of the state sector in these economies, the power relationships within the dominant elite have already begun to change. Fragments of the old elite are increasingly isolated from the new centres of power, while others are being forced out of their positions altogether. Only those members of the old guard have managed to survive who were able to

<sup>5</sup> (cont.)

*Politics & Society*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1986-87; Iván Szelényi, *Socialist Entrepreneurs: Embourgeoisement in Rural Hungary*, Madison 1988; Szonja Szelényi, 'Social Inequality and Party Membership', *American Sociological Review* 52, October 1987.

<sup>6</sup> See Tamás Kolosi, 'Stratification and Social Structure in Hungary', *Annual Review of Sociology* 14, 1988; Tamás Kolosi, *Társadalmi Stratifikáció* (Stratified Society), Budapest 1989; Szelényi, 'Prospects and Limits'

convert their political privileges into cultural assets or economic capital. In the post-Communist regime in Hungary, professionals in high-ranking positions (especially those *without* prior attachment to the MSZMP) are acquiring new powers of influence. It follows that, in the transition to post-Communism, the ruling elite is highly fragmented. The old-line bureaucracy, in the Gouldnerian sense of the term, is shrinking in size, while a new class of intellectuals is becoming hegemonic.<sup>7</sup> Together they constitute 5 to 10 per cent of the working population.

It is not only professionals but also the emergent entrepreneurial class that is fragmented. This latter is composed of at least three fractions. Following Poulantzas, its first and largest section can be characterized as the *new petty bourgeoisie*.<sup>8</sup> This class fragment grew out of what used to be the *second economy*: its members are small proprietors in agriculture, service industries and (increasingly) manufacturing. This is potentially a large sector. According to a recent opinion poll, 25 to 30 per cent of all Hungarians expressed a wish to start up a business; this may be regarded as the percentage of aspiring, or potential, members of the new petty bourgeoisie. Realistically, however, as of Autumn 1990, only about 10 per cent of the working population could be regarded as belonging to this class category.

The second fragment of the entrepreneurial class comprises those members of the old Communist elite who, through management buy-outs or joint ventures with Western firms, have successfully converted their political assets into economic capital.<sup>9</sup> They are what might be called a 'political bourgeoisie' in Central Europe. Although this class fragment is much smaller in size than the new petty bourgeoisie, it has attracted a great deal of political interest and, for this reason alone, may end up playing a significant role in the shaping of Hungarian political culture.

Finally, the third segment of the entrepreneurial class grew directly out of foreign investments in the Hungarian economy. By the autumn of 1990 foreign capital had begun to play a significant role in the economic life of Central European societies. Through joint ventures and by direct investments, foreign owners and their comprador intelligentsia (that is, professionals hired by foreign capitalists to run their local affairs) have started to have a significant impact on social and political life. The number of 'players' in this group is still rather small, but their influence is considerable because they control many outlets in the mass media.<sup>10</sup>

Last but not least, the third class position, that of the working class, is also fragmented today. In addition to the well-known cleavages in this

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<sup>7</sup> See Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, Oxford 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, London 1978, pp. 209–23.

<sup>9</sup> For examples of such conversions, see Elemér Hankiss, *Közel-Európai Alternatívák* (East European Alternatives), Budapest 1989; Jadwiga Staniszkis, *The Dynamics of the Breakthrough in Eastern Europe*, Berkeley forthcoming; Erzsébet Szalai, 'Az Új Elit' (The New Elite), *Bazis* 27, 1989; Erzsébet Szalai, 'Ismét az Új Elitről' (The New Elite Revisited), *Élet és Irodalom*, 8 December 1989.

<sup>10</sup> The extent of sale of public property to domestic and foreign owners is unknown, but is almost certainly under 10 per cent of all formerly state-controlled assets.

class (namely, the distinctions between blue- and white-collar workers, skilled and unskilled manual jobs, supervisors and supervisees, and so forth), the presence of the 'second economy' has produced another division among workers; this distinguishes between those who are involved in the second economy and those who are left out. Already by the mid 1980s two-thirds of all Hungarian households made some of their living from the second economy. Of course, most households depend mainly on their wages from the state, but a growing proportion have begun to live a genuinely dual existence between the private and state sectors.<sup>21</sup>

Having completed our mapping of the post-Communist class structure, it remains to locate the three 'political fields' among the class cleavages identified. These are illustrated in Figure 1. The liberal field opens between the intellectual elite (especially its professional or 'technocratic' fraction) and the entrepreneurial class. SZDSZ and FIDESZ are the two parties that have competed, so far, for this constituency. In an interview with one of the daily newspapers,<sup>22</sup> Bálint Magyar, one of the most articulate theorists of SZDSZ, described the class character of his party thus: 'our social base is composed of three groups: the radical salaried workers, the small entrepreneurs, and a significant proportion of the intelligentsia.' The Christian-nationalist field is located between the entrepreneurial class and the working class. It is especially popular among those members of the working class who participate in the second economy. This constituency is contested by three parties: MDF, FKGP, and KDNP. Finally, the social-democratic field opens up between the working class and the intellectual elite. With the transition to a market economy, a large proportion of the working class is expected to suffer a great deal: many will be thrown out of their jobs and, without exception, all will experience a decline in their standard of living. In pushing for some protection from the state, this fraction of the working class may find allies not just in the old-line Stalinist bureaucracy but also among those professionals who either have ideological reservations about full-scale privatization or who are themselves existentially threatened by the current transformation.

### Predictions and Results

The March–April elections produced the following distribution of parliamentary seats across the three political fields in Hungary: (1) The governing Christian-nationalist (centre–right) coalition polled 59.5 per cent of all votes: 42.7 per cent of these went to MDF, 11.4 per cent to FKGP, and 5.4 per cent to KDNP. (2) The two liberal parties received 29 per cent of the vote: 23.6 per cent went to SZDSZ and 5.4 per cent to FIDESZ. (3) MSZP was supported by 8.5 per cent of all voters. (4) The remaining 3 per cent of seats (out of a total of 386) were won by members of other (mostly smaller) parties and by independent candidates.

From the perspective of our class-analytic approach, the most surprising

<sup>21</sup> Szélenyi, 'Prospects and Limits', pp. 124–9, István Gábor, 'The Major Domains of the Second Economy', in Péter Galasi and György Sziráczi, eds, *Market and Second Economy in Hungary*, Frankfurt 1985, pp. 133–79.

<sup>22</sup> See *Magyar Nemzet*, 1 August 1990, p. 5.

result of these elections was the poor showing of those parties that were nominally competing for the social-democratic field. MSZP won only 8.5 per cent of the seats in parliament, while the other two parties, MSZMP (the orthodox wing of the former Communist Party) and MSZDP (the Hungarian Social-Democratic Party, or *Magyar Szociáldemokrata Párt*) just missed out on the 4 per cent vote necessary to obtain a seat in parliament. Overall, therefore, the political forces that were ready to use the 'socialist' or the 'social-democratic' label in the elections received less than 16 per cent of the popular vote, even though our analysis suggested that some 20 to 30 per cent of the working population (that is, most of the working class and some segments of the professional class) could have voted for them. The discrepancy between the observed outcome of the elections and expectations generated from our analysis of the Hungarian class structure requires an explanation.

Similarly, it is important to account for the relatively unsuccessful performance of the liberal parties in the elections. To be sure, SZDSZ and FIDESZ both fared reasonably well, given the extent of their potential social base. Nevertheless, when considering how popular they were in the early stages of the election campaign, it is clear that they performed less well than expected. At the start of the election campaign, during the summer of 1989, SZDSZ was trailing way behind MDF in the public-opinion polls. By December, however, they were level, leading many observers to conclude that the March–April elections could produce a liberal victory. It is important to explain why SZDSZ could appear so close to victory and yet, in the end, still lose the elections.

The poor performance of political parties on the left and the weakening of SZDSZ during the last few weeks of the electoral campaigns are both linked to the fact that the social-democratic field remained unrepresented in the contest for political power. Neither the old Communist Party (MSZMP), nor its reformed wing (MSZP), were able to transform themselves into organizations genuinely representative of the working class. As a consequence, the social-democratic field was—at least in principle—wide open for SZDSZ. However, as it turned out, the liberals did not dare to occupy the left ground, and for this reason alone lost the elections. In illustrating this point, we will show, first of all, that the social characteristics of voters are accurately predicted by our class theory. At the same time, we will demonstrate that those who did not vote in the elections constituted a reservoir of social-democratic sentiment that SZDSZ could have tapped. It is our contention, in fact, that non-voters in Hungary decided against participation in the elections because none of the parties running articulated their interests.

The elections were conducted in two rounds; those candidates who did not win an absolute majority in the first series of votes were required to run again. In the first round, 35 per cent of those eligible did not cast their vote; this rose to 55 per cent in the second round. Which way this 'silent majority' would have voted, who could have inspired them to participate in the elections, and with what kind of political programme they could have been mobilized, are decisive questions for the political future of Central Europe.

In May 1990, the Social Research Information Society (*Társadalomkutatási Informatikai Társulás* or TÁRKI) conducted a nationwide survey of public opinion in Hungary. Following the well-established format of Hungarian social-stratification surveys, a sample of 981 individuals were questioned about their education, income and occupation. In addition, they were asked if they participated in the March–April elections, which party they supported with their vote, and what their attitudes were on a range of social, economic and political issues.<sup>13</sup> Results from this survey indicate that our class-analytic approach predicted fairly accurately the outcome of the elections. As anticipated, the two liberal parties, SZDSZ and FIDESZ, appealed mostly to professionals, while MDF enjoyed a more diverse class base. At the same time, the results show that class and class-based economic attitudes do not fully explain respondents' choice of party. Social-structural variables account for a much larger percentage of the total variation in voter turnout than they do in party choice.

### Class, Apathy and the Non-Vote

In examining class patterns in party preference, we have found that MDF was the least class- or status-based of all the political parties in Hungary. In the March–April elections its electoral base cut across class lines, and support for its policies came evenly from sub-populations with different age and educational profiles. By comparison, SZDSZ was favoured mainly by white-collar workers (particularly by general non-manual workers and professionals), while FKGP and KDNP were popular mostly among peasants and blue-collar workers. As noted earlier, there is no simple and direct relation between class background and party preference.

The electoral performance of FIDESZ, FKGP and KDNP lends further evidence to our claims. As expected, FKGP was the most 'populist' of all the parties: 73 per cent of those who claimed to have voted for this party were agricultural and blue-collar workers. KDNP followed closely with 70.2 per cent of the 'populist' vote, while only 44.1 per cent of FIDESZ voters belonged to this sector. MSZP was the least popular among agricultural and blue-collar workers, which represented only 39.2 per cent of its vote. It also received a lower level of support—32.7 per cent—from those less-educated.

Our most significant finding is that class is a more reliable predictor of voter turnout than it is of party choice. Specifically, we found that both blue-collar workers and less-educated people represented a significant proportion of those who stayed away from the polling booths. In May 1990, for instance, blue-collar workers constituted 52 per cent of the Hungarian labour force, yet 63 per cent of all 'no-shows' came from this class category. Likewise, 38 per cent of those voting in May 1990 had completed eight years of schooling or less, yet as many as 50 per cent of those who did not vote in the elections came from this less-educated sector.

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<sup>13</sup> The collection of data was supervised by Tamás Kolosi, director of TÁRKI. The questionnaire was administered as part of a larger survey sponsored by the International Social Survey Program. For greater detail, see Tamás Kolosi, *International Social Survey Program: Hungary 1990*, Budapest 1990.



The effects of class and education on voter turnout, can be explained in two ways. On the one hand, it might be argued that the mass abstention of blue-collar workers and less-educated individuals indicates their lack of interest in politics. This is by no means a new line of argument, but one frequently employed in explanations of the same general trend in Western democratic regimes.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Central European societies, however, a second argument could be made that the strength of the class effect on voter turnout is an indication that none of the parties offered a political package that was attractive to blue-collar workers. Accordingly, two alternative explanations of the non-vote in Hungary present themselves: one would tell a story about working-class 'apathy', while the other would pay attention to characteristics of the 'social-democratic constituency' and, on the basis of this, consider the non-vote as a 'protest vote'—that is, a vote against the absence of a viable social-democratic alternative.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, both factors—apathy as well as protest—influenced non-voter behaviour in the March–April elections. As it turns out, however, lack of interest in political life seems to have played a surprisingly minor role. The question of apathy was present in a single item on the May 1990 survey: this asked respondents how interested they were in political issues.<sup>15</sup> Contrary to what one might have expected, the overwhelming majority of non-voters were either 'considerably' or 'very interested' in politics. What is more, we observed the same pattern of responses among voters. From this it follows that apathy provides, at best, a partial explanation for why people did not vote in the elections.

In line with our second theory of voter turnout, data from the May 1990 survey indicates a strong correlation between political attitudes and electoral participation. Specifically, we found that people with strong social-democratic values were significantly overrepresented among non-voters.

### An Untapped Constituency

It is not surprising that social, political and economic values played an important role in the Hungarian elections, given the enormity of the social change that the electorate was being asked to effect. In the course of their election campaigns, the two major opposition parties (MDF and SZDSZ) focused heavily on social and ethical issues. Candidates for SZDSZ were particularly outspoken on questions relating to civil liberties, and were also quite critical of MDF for not being sufficiently committed to these issues. In its political programme, MDF was indistinguishable from SZDSZ on human-rights issues. However, its position on social questions—particularly with respect to abortion—was considerably more conservative than that of SZDSZ.

The scale of the difference between the two parties became especially

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Roberto Michels, *Political Parties*, New York 1966.

<sup>15</sup> The precise wording of this question was as follows: 'Mennyire érdeklődik ön a politika iránt?' (How interested are you in politics?). The full set of possible responses included 'nagyon' (very much), 'melehetősen' (considerably), 'nem nagyon' (not very much), 'egy kicsit' (a little), and 'egyáltalán nem' (not at all).

apparent in the closing speeches made by their leaders on the night before the vital second round of the elections. In his final words to the television audience, the leader of MDF, József Antall, pledged that those who supported his party would vote for a 'quiet force'; while the leader of SZDSZ, János Kis, promised the electorate a 'radical change', and a 'smashing of the party state'.

While MDF and SZDSZ differed considerably on social issues, their stances on economic matters were similar: both advocated the privatization of production units and the expansion of free markets, and neither paid much attention to questions of unemployment and growing inequalities. In other words, both parties offered the electorate a clear choice between conservative and liberal values on social issues, but neither appealed to those voters who wanted to cast their ballot in favour of a welfare state, security of employment, and protected social benefits.

Results from the May 1990 survey indicate the main difference between voters and non-voters to be much smaller on social issues and significantly more pronounced on attitudes towards economic reorganization. Thus, while we found that non-voters were, on average, more conservative on social issues than voters, it is also true that they held stronger social-democratic opinions on economic matters. This suggests a curious discrepancy between popularly held attitudes and party platforms in the elections: the major opposition parties all positioned themselves on the political right (in the Western sense of the term), but public opinion was overwhelmingly in favour of social-democratic measures. Thus, for instance, when respondents in the May 1990 survey were asked whether it was the responsibility of the state to assure full employment, control prices, promote social justice, or monitor spending on health care, welfare, and education, 80 to 90 per cent gave answers that favoured a Scandinavian—that is, a social-democratic—type of government.

Differences between voters and non-voters were not restricted to issues relating to economic reform. Our analyses indicate that at the time of the elections non-voters were particularly concerned with issues relating to jobs (unemployment, pensions, benefits), while voters were more interested in abstract social-policy matters (government spending on culture, the environment, education). In many ways, therefore, the main difference between these two groups might be seen as that between left-Labourites and middle-of-the-road (or even right-wing) social democrats.

At any rate, it is clear from these results that there existed a large social-democratic constituency (both in terms of class position and political attitudes) in Hungary, and, moreover, that the interests of this constituency were unrepresented during the last elections. For this reason, then, we believe that Hungarian political parties are unduly complacent. What is emerging in political life may well be only the tip of an iceberg; dramatic changes could take place any day. The strong correlation between welfare-statist attitudes (on economic matters) and conservative values (on social issues) makes the situation particularly explosive. It suggests, above all else, that the 'silent majority' in the last elections could be mobilized in the future either around

welfare issues (that is, around its strong social-democratic values), or around issues of law and order (appealing to its conservative social values). What this suggests, of course, is that the potential for Peronism is as real in the political future of Central Europe as is a Scandinavian-style welfare-state government.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, as we argue below, the direction the political organization of these countries will take has less to do with the nature of their class structure, or the character of their political culture, than with the dynamics of institution-building and the role of political leadership in the transition to post-Communism.

Our main argument, then, is that the social-democratic constituency in Hungary is considerable, but that it has remained unmobilized in recent elections. By implication, therefore, the political culture of post-Communist societies is potentially less right-wing than has hitherto been demonstrated. The obvious question, of course, is why none of the political parties in Hungary have tried to mobilize this social-democratic constituency. In answering this question we hope to demonstrate that the unique dynamics of political institution-building and the question of political leadership are factors as important as the social composition of constituencies in the making of political fields.

### Strategy and Image

During the summer of 1989, SZDSZ perceived MDF as a centre-left party with close links to the Communists (especially its populist wing represented by Imre Pozsgay). SZDSZ therefore focused its line of attack on the left of MDF. In an interview given at this time Bálint Magyar called MDF a 'crypto-communist party'—a vehicle that would enable Pozsgay to prepare himself for the collapse of Communism while at once preserving his existing power-base. Magyar argued that MDF was the post-Communist analogue of the Peasant Party, which, after 1945, was the umbrella organization of a number of left-wing populist writers (that is, the party of the 'Third Way') who proved to be little more than Communist fellow travellers. During the autumn of 1989, SZDSZ continued its line of attack on MDF by criticizing its pact with the MSZP on the issue of the presidential elections. According to this deal, MDF was to have given the relatively strong presidency to MSZP (and, specifically, to Pozsgay) in return for majority rule in parliament. Suggestions were also made by SZDSZ officials that MDF may even have granted MSZP a 'junior partner' role in government. Following the Polish pattern, the MDF-MSZP alliance had hoped to accomplish this by holding early presidential elections—an ingenious solution. If elections could have been held by the end of 1989 (or at the beginning of 1990), Pozsgay would have been guaranteed the presidency. After all, he was far ahead in the public-opinion polls. (At this

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<sup>16</sup> Juan Peron was elected as president of Argentina in 1946 largely by working-class support. In its centrist-authoritarian politics, Peronism brought together a unique combination of nationalist sentiments with right-wing social attitudes, as well as a strong sense of law and order and a positive orientation towards trade unions. For more details on Peronism, see Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man*, New York 1960, pp. 173-5; Guillermo A. O'Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Autobureaucraticism*, Berkeley 1979, pp. 56-77.

early stage opposition candidates had not yet had a chance to make a name for themselves.)

With acute political insight, SZDSZ did not sign the agreement between MDF and MSZP, but instead called for a referendum to determine the timing of the presidential elections. According to Hungarian law, parliament is compelled to call a referendum on an issue if more than 100,000 signatures demand it. SZDSZ had easily collected some 200,000 signatures to this end and, in November 1989, the referendum was held. MDF was in disarray and unable to respond to the challenge posed by SZDSZ. Members of the party, however, began to sense that their ties to Pozsgay were becoming a handicap and that, in future, they would have to demonstrate greater distance from MSZP to succeed in political life. During the referendum, MSZP advised its supporters to vote 'no' on the question of whether presidential elections should be delayed. MDF, rather than follow the MSZP suggestion, called instead for a boycott. On the surface, this was not an unreasonable political strategy. According to Hungarian law, after all, 50 per cent of the electorate has to vote in order for the referendum to be valid. Had the MDF plan worked, SZDSZ could have lost the referendum. Unfortunately for MDF, however, the referendum produced a good turnout (about 60 per cent of those eligible voted) and, by a small margin, the 'yes' vote was ratified. Against the wishes of MDF, therefore, the presidential elections were delayed.

The call for a referendum was a shrewd political move on the part of SZDSZ because it resulted in the breakup of the alliance between MSZP and MDF. In the process it also succeeded in humiliating MDF, which, following the referendum, began to perform poorly in public-opinion polls. As a consequence, SZDSZ gained considerable popularity among Hungarian voters, although it did so by locating itself on the right of MDF. This initial success was, however, short-lived and the dynamics of political institution-building took a new turn.

Soon after the referendum, József Antall took over the leadership of MDF. A historian, whose father was a leading government official under Admiral Horthy, he had little to do with left-wing populist writers of MDF that SZDSZ linked to the Communist Party. Antall and his circle had aristocratic connections; they were more centre-right Christian-democrats than left-wing populists—in contrast to those who controlled MDF prior to Antall's leadership. In an effort to distance himself from MSZP, Antall gradually cut loose the left-populist wing of MDF and moved his party without difficulty to the right. He was quick to realize that, if the name of the Hungarian political game was anti-Communism, he could play this better than SZDSZ. After all, the latter's leadership included many with relatively strong left-wing pasts: János Kis, for instance, was a Lukács disciple and a prominent young Marxist during the early 1970s; Miklós Haraszti was a Maoist and a vocal opponent of the Kádárist re-privatization programme during the late 1960s; even Gáspár Tamás (the most articulate supporter of nineteenth-century liberalism currently in SZDSZ) began his political career with anarcho-syndicalist aspirations. A large number of SZDSZ leaders also came from old (Communist) cadre families. Beginning in January 1990, then, MDF politicians began to criticize

the social and political origins of the SZDSZ leadership and, in so doing, succeeded in beating the party at its own game. Antall and his circle emerged from this battle more authentically right-wing than members of SZDSZ.

Following this new line of attack from MDF, SZDSZ hesitated briefly over the nature of its political field. The leader of the party, János Kis, has consistent left-wing values and would have been quite comfortable with a social-democratic party platform. In an interview given during one of his official visits to Paris, in fact, he characterized SZDSZ as a 'centre-left' party.<sup>7</sup> As it turns out, this statement was mere wishful thinking. Given the nature of the attack from MDF, the leadership of SZDSZ considered it too risky to assume a left-wing stand and consequently the Paris statement made by Kis was swiftly shelved. Leadership of the party was assumed by a group of free-marketeers who continued the party's earlier policy of trying to position itself on the political right of MDF. In the light of the March–April election results, it is now clear that this was a strategic error: by confirming their initial winning tactic as a long-term strategy, SZDSZ lost the elections. Given the strength of the social-democratic field in Hungary, SZDSZ could have performed much better if, following the MDF–MSZP split, it had occupied the political field now wide open on the centre-left.

After the elections, SZDSZ found itself in a difficult situation. Its representatives sat in a parliament dominated by centre-right political forces. Antall's confessed political model is Adenauer; however one looks at the matter, there is little room to the right of this position. To demonstrate its difference from the ruling party, SZDSZ has continued to display its liberalism on social issues. Thus, for instance, it fought bitterly against the reintroduction of religious instruction in schools. Though this is undoubtedly a worthwhile cause, it is one unlikely to produce additional votes. According to a recent survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Institute in Budapest, by the end of May 1990 MDF and SZDSZ had both begun to lose public support, with the latter being the bigger loser of the two parties.

Given its current appeal across the three political fields, SZDSZ is probably destined to become a party as ineffectual as the Free Democrats in Germany, or the Liberal-Democratic Party in Britain. From its current position it will never take power away from MDF. Its success is therefore contingent on its ability to transform itself: it needs to move into the centre-left position and construct a programme that emphasizes welfare-state policies and issues of social justice. Despite its numerous strategic errors, SZDSZ continues to be the party best positioned to fill the social-democratic field in Hungarian political culture. Other contenders' claims for this constituency are less convincing. For their part, the successor parties of the old Communist elite, MSZMP and MSZP, simply have no appeal. As we have already demonstrated, MSZP is the party that relies more heavily on the upper-middle class than any other party; its support among the working class is the weakest. This is not surprising of course: the Communist Party is seen as having betrayed the fundamental interests

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<sup>7</sup> This interview with Kis took place in December 1989

of the working class for forty years; it is unclear why workers should begin to trust it now.

The poor performance of MSZDP, the only party with an expressly social-democratic platform, was more of a surprise. Early commentators expected a good performance in the elections. It received a great deal of support from Western social-democratic parties and, given the strength of such sentiments in Hungary, was favoured on the eve of the elections to be the winning party. These expectations notwithstanding, MSZDP failed to obtain even 4 per cent of the votes and, consequently, was unable to place any representatives in parliament. The reasons for this failure are complex, but worthy of attention. Most important is the fact that, unlike the winning parties, MSZDP had considerable difficulty with institution-building. In the initial stages of the election campaign, an 'old guard' of Communists tried to rebuild the party from the inside. There were two problems with this strategy. First, the members of this group were all men in their seventies and eighties with little political future. Secondly, they were unable to get along with one another. Their efforts to rebuild the party were delayed by constant disagreement, until eventually they gave up and broke away. At this point, a group of younger members tried to institute reforms, but their strategy also failed. In fact, young members of the party were in constant conflict with the 'old guard'; but, due to their political inexperience and vulnerability, they were ultimately outmanoeuvred.

Following these internal fights, the party tried once more to restructure itself by rebuilding its public profile. But in so doing, it made further mistakes. For example, in selecting an image, it chose to return to the tradition of the 1920s and appeal to the worker with a hammer in his hand. Predictably, this came across as an entirely inauthentic appeal and cost the party many votes. As a final strategy, MSZDP elected a woman to chair the party. Although she possessed considerable charm as well as ability, it became clear in the course of the election campaign that she lacked charisma and was unable to garner votes. Internal conflicts, lack of leadership, wrong policies, and a dated image thus worked together to undermine the party's relaunch.

### Problems of Legitimation

Events during the second half of 1990 gave further support to our argument that political institutions in post-Communist Central Europe fail to represent the strength of social-democratic sentiment in civil society. The municipal elections, held on 14 October, are a good case in point. Once again the turnout was abysmally low: fewer than one third of those eligible to vote turned up at the polls. This degree of participation would normally be regarded as serious cause for concern. The October results, however, were particularly disturbing as political parties campaigned *explicitly* on the slogan that municipal elections, more than any other attempt at economic restructuring, represented a real change in regime. It is apparent from the results that voters disagreed with this assessment; and, to make matters worse, they actually re-elected a significant number of mayors from the old government.

The municipal elections produced a humiliating defeat for MDF and its allies. Unlike in the March–April elections, SZDSZ and FIDESZ obtained an almost equal proportion of the votes and, in so doing, gained an absolute majority in most municipal governments. In particular, these results represented a major victory for FIDESZ, which increased its popular vote significantly. Interestingly, although SZDSZ received only the same level of support from eligible voters as in the March–April elections, it now had a larger share of the total number of votes cast. This was because a significant proportion of those who voted MDF earlier in the year either did not turn up at the polls or had cast their vote in favour of FIDESZ.

The municipal elections also showed the newly elected government to be suffering from a growing problem of legitimization. During the early stages of the transition to post-Communism, opposition forces (among them, of course, MDF and its allies) argued that the power of the Communists lacked legitimacy because it was not sanctioned by popular support. Ironically, the first freely elected government in Hungary also lacked popular support: it was chosen by a majority of that minority of voters who cast their ballot in the March–April elections. By October 1990, the democratic process had deteriorated to such an extent that mayors were elected to office with as little as 15 per cent of eligible voters supporting them.

Those who attributed low voter turnout to 'apathy' were taught an important lesson during the last week of October, when taxi drivers staged a blockade and brought the entire city of Budapest to a halt. The issue behind this strike was straightforward. The Hungarian government—without consultation with the Chamber of Commerce, trade unions or members of parliament—announced its intention to double petrol prices overnight. An increase of this magnitude, if enacted, would have threatened the economic well-being of many taxi drivers. In an effort to prevent this, they decided to engage in collective action: within two or three hours of the government announcement, they blocked all intersections in the country and paralysed transportation for two full days.

This event was of considerable sociological interest. It indicated, for example, that what we have identified as the legitimization crisis of the Hungarian government is not restricted to the ruling coalition, but encompasses, in fact, the entire political system. The taxi drivers chose to express their dissatisfaction with the government in an act of civil disobedience because they had lost confidence in their parliamentary representatives, who had failed to support their interest. Although members of parliament were reluctant to show solidarity with the taxi drivers' cause, the general population was not. According to a small telephone survey conducted by the Hungarian Public Opinion Research Institute a day after the strike, 60 per cent of the population gave unconditional support to the taxi drivers and another 25 per cent expressed sympathy with their cause. This is not entirely surprising given that spokespersons for the taxi drivers had successfully reframed the particular interests of the drivers as a much broader national cause. Specifically, they argued that the government was using the Gulf crisis, as well as the resulting increase in prices, to

boost tax revenues from the sale of petrol. They were also quite successful at convincing people that this strategy was unwise economically, because its inflationary results might have disastrous effects in an economy already bordering on hyper-inflation. With the doubling of petrol prices, they argued, about half of all taxi drivers would go out of business; there would be an expansion in the relative size of the proletariat; competition for work would increase; and all would suffer from the inflationary effects of fuel price increases.

The dispute ended in a negotiated settlement. In an uncommon alliance, the trade unions and representatives of the Chamber of Commerce joined forces against the government (or, to put it more generally, against the new political class) and forced it to accept a compromise. The price of petrol was reduced, the amount of tax on each gallon was set at a fixed amount (rather than as a percentage); thus, within the range of world market prices, government and its negotiating partners finally agreed on a modest price increase.

One of the more positive results of the taxi drivers' blockade was a major restructuring of the political parties. SZDSZ, under the leadership of Kis, once again made a cautious opening toward the centre-left. Restructuring also took place on the political Left: Pozsgay departed from MSZP and announced his intention to form a 'national centre' political party.<sup>18</sup> Upon being freed from Pozsgay, MSZP held a national congress and formulated an unambiguously social-democratic programme. MDF also responded to the crisis with a major reorganization: populists within the party expressed dissatisfaction with József Antall for pushing the party too far to the right and argued for a political programme that would recapture the left-populist vote. It is clear from these efforts at reorganization that the political class in Hungary is beginning to learn the rules of electoral politics: politicians are starting to think in terms of constituencies and not in terms of ideologically inspired political programmes. Moreover, they are also showing concern about the low electoral turnout, and are formulating policies intended to gain the support of the silent majority.

The taxi drivers' action and its popular support showed the electorate in Hungary to be far from apathetic. If people stayed away from the election booths, it was not because they lacked an interest in politics but because they simply did not see any of the political parties offering a desirable alternative to Communist rule. Throughout this article we have argued that the 'silent majority' could go in different directions politically. From this point of view, the presidential elections in Poland in December 1990 were of considerable significance. Mazowieczki, who represented a sober version of liberal economic policies, suffered a humiliating defeat at the polls: he finished only third in the first round, being beaten by an unknown Polish emigré from Canada. In the second round, Walesa secured roughly 75 per

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<sup>18</sup> In our terminology, Pozsgay's new party will represent an alliance between the centre-left and the nationalist centre-right.



cent of the votes, and he did so with a largely 'Peronist' programme: he promised his electorate security, law and order, as well as strong leadership.<sup>19</sup>

In sum, we have argued that there exists a large social-democratic constituency in Hungary around which a possible challenge to the currently dominant Christian-nationalist regime could emerge. We have also demonstrated, however, that during the electoral campaigns of 1989-90 the interests of this constituency remained unarticulated for a number of (mostly) institutional reasons. It is our contention that the future of Hungarian politics depends on whether these institutional problems can be overcome. If the necessary centre-left force fails to emerge in the future, then the dominance of the Christian-nationalist forces could last a millennium. If a major crisis evolves (due to an explosive rise in unemployment, for example, or to unbearable increases in social inequality), however, it is possible that a right-wing force could rise to power in Hungary—a force further to the right than Antall's regime. This force could then fill the gap that the potential centre-left parties failed to occupy in the last election.

<sup>19</sup> Significantly, voter turnout in the Polish elections was almost as low as in Hungary. On 9 December, when Walensa was elected president, only 55 per cent of the electorate turned out to vote.

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## The Place of Theory

Readers not yet familiar with Fredric Jameson's corpus will find this collection of his theoretical essays a useful introduction to the major themes and methods that have dominated his work for two decades.\* From the groundbreaking programmatic text, 'Metacommentary' (1971), to his more recent writings on postmodernism (represented here by 'The Politics of Theory' [1984] and 'Architecture and the Critique of Ideology' [1985]), virtually the full range of Jameson's interests can be gleaned from these two volumes. And even though the title correctly identifies their overarching concern with theory, one finds here also what remains Jameson's most engaging side: his considerable ingenuity as a reader of literary texts. The essays on Robbe-Grillet and Thomas More, for example, whose ultimate topics are theoretical (modernism and utopian discourse, respectively), offer splendid original readings of individual texts (*Jealousy* and *Utopia*). The collection also includes a provocative introduction by Neil Larsen situating Jameson's project in relation to certain critiques it has elicited both from within and beyond the Marxist camp.

Confronted by such a rich and heterogeneous body of texts, one is hard-pressed to give a fair account of their underlying methodological coherence. It is as if when finding ourselves baffled by the apparent eclecticism of Jameson's enthusiasms—puzzled how he can with almost equal ease commend the procedures of Roland Barthes's *S/Z* or Max Weber's diagnoses of the passage in the West from religion to rationalization alongside Marx's dicta on the universality of class struggle in history—we must seek to reconcile these conflicting research programmes, to synthesize them in that 'totalizing explanation' which Jameson holds to be Marxism's signal claim to 'formal superiority over all the other partial kinds of accounts.' (Vol. 1, p. 133). We tend to be reassured when we pronounce Jameson's Marxism as just old-fashioned Hegelianism, or an updated version of Lukácsian mediation theory, confident that we already know what all that means and what its blindnesses and theoretical weaknesses entail.

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\* Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971–1986*, Volume 1 'Situations of Theory'; Volume 2 'Syntax of History', Routledge, London 1988, £10.99 pbk, each volume; Minnesota University Press, Minnesota 1988, \$39.95 hbk, \$13.95 pbk, each volume.

Bearing in mind Jameson's own cautions in this matter, presented in the separate introductions to each of the present volumes, I shall nonetheless hazard the label 'Hegelian' as the most adequate description for Jameson's critical procedure, but only on the understanding that (1) Hegel's method in philosophy founds a particular practice of scientific inquiry; and (2) Jameson's own relationship to this Hegel has altered over the years, so that the once fairly orthodox acceptance of the imperative for historical materialism to produce scientific knowledge has gradually been displaced by a different task: 'the elaboration of a properly Marxist "ideology"' (Vol. 1, p. 110).

In the introduction to *Aesthetics*, Hegel characterizes his method as follows: 'Philosophy has to consider an object in its necessity or external ordering, classification, etc.; it has to unfold and prove the object, according to the necessity of its own inner nature.' In the case of art, however, the difficulty of producing scientific explanations is enhanced by the numerous particular or accidental properties which individual works exhibit, so that Hegel is compelled to assert further that 'it is only in relation to the essential inner progress of its content and means of expression that we may refer to [the individual work's] *necessary* formation.' Jameson's earliest formulation of his own methodological protocols reproduced Hegel's concept of a scientific method: 'the process of criticism is not so much an interpretation of content as it is a revealing of it, a laying bare, a restoration of the original message, the original experience, from beneath the distortions of the censor' (Vol. 1, p. 14). Works of art exhibit structures of contradiction, as Jameson will put it some years later apropos of Corneille, and while these structures are visible 'in the very bones and marrow of literary form itself' (Vol. 1, p. 136), their ultimate causality lies elsewhere: in the historical specificity of the Fronde, whose struggle as a class fraction against the power of the absolutist state produced artefacts like *Cinna*, with its imaginary resolution of the real contradiction in the Fronde's political-ideological situation. As Jameson flatly declares in 'Metacommentary': 'it is axiomatic that the existence of a determinate literary form always reflects a certain possibility of experience in the moment of social development in question' (Vol. 1, p. 9).

The principles of this method are never entirely abandoned in Jameson's critical practice. No matter how much space he devotes to the formal intricacies of a specific text or the theoretical subtlety of an author's corpus, Jameson inevitably returns to the text's or author's socio-historical moment to show how the apparently idiosyncratic or personal was in fact a necessary and determinate response to a given set of conditions in the real world. In the essay on Max Weber, for instance, Jameson refers the apparently unique circumstances of Weber's psychic crisis, with its immediate origins in his own family situation, to the 'plane of social history'. The conflict between maternal and paternal values, which crystallized in Weber's expulsion of his father from the family home and his subsequent breakdown six weeks later, can be seen as one between distinct class fractions of the nineteenth-century German bourgeoisie, reproduced in Weber's own theory by the irreconcilable, but equally unavoidable, alternatives of

'value-free science' and the charismatic hero (Vol. 2, p. 34). Or in the essay on Robbe-Grillet (really a long review of Jacques Leenhardt's book on that author), the programmatic refusal of the referential dimension in fictional events that is the *nouveau roman*'s ostensive *carte d'identité* is itself hypothesized as one variation within a broad historical movement (modernism) whose aesthetic imperative is most accurately described 'as an effort to *repress* that referential content [of colonialism] and to defuse the implications of its raw material' (Vol. 1, p. 178), and whose 'ultimate evaluation... is thus at one with the diagnosis of the new "société de consommation" itself' (Vol. 1, p. 177).

Jameson's commitment to those aspects of classical Marxism which insist on the priority of class and even on determination in the last instance by the economy (see, for example, the final essay in this collection, 'Periodizing the 60s') is never in doubt. What has altered, however, since his declaration circa 1971 of the necessity for a scientific method in literary or cultural study, is his sense of the place or situation of scientific discourse itself. Hegel, at least from the period of the *Phenomenology* onwards, had no difficulty distinguishing the scientificity of his own discourse from the ideological mystifications of his contemporaries—Schelling, for example. Nor did Marx seriously question the cognitive superiority of his own theory in relation to that of classical economy. Jameson, it would seem, is no longer quite so certain. He quotes without comment, but with apparent approval, the following sentence by Louis Marin: 'Utopian discourse accompanies ideological discourse as its converse and designates the still empty place of a scientific theory of society' (Vol. 2, p. 101). Analogously, in discussing the various subject positions projected by Lacanian psychoanalysis, he characterizes the 'discourse of the analyst' (that is, scientific discourse properly speaking) as 'not, unlike the discourse of the master, a position of authority...; rather, it is a position of articulated receptivity, of deep listening (*L'écoute*), of some attention beyond the self or the ego, but one that may need to use those bracketed personal functions as instruments for hearing the Other's desire' (Vol. 1, p. 115). Why, one is constrained to ask, must scientific discourse share features or experiences with the object of its inquiry? Biologists can, after all, give correct descriptions of amoebas without in any useful sense being amoeba-like. Historical materialism does not, *pace* Jameson, share in Vico's conviction that we can only comprehend what we have made or resemble in some essential way.

This is why, despite admiration for the courage and conviction of Jameson's insistence upon it, one remains sceptical of the following dictum which has defined the methodological parameters of his work over the past decade: 'Among the conditions of possibility of Marxism itself as a new type of dialectical thought was... the commodification of land and labor completed only by the emergence of capitalism; but if this were its only historical precondition, it could be argued that Marxism as such was merely a theoretical "reflection" of early or classical capitalism. It is, however, also the anticipatory expression of a future society, or... the partisan commitment to that future or Utopian mode of production which seeks to emerge from the

hegemonic mode of production of our own present' (Vol. 2, p. 176). True enough, but that is not what makes Marxism scientific. One can hazard the opinion that it is only on the condition of its capacity to give scientific accounts of the past and present that Marxism could effectively serve to bring the utopian future into being. Such was Lenin's claim, as it was Marx's conviction. The former utilized the instruments of historical materialism to analyse the conjuncture in Tsarist Russia as being ripe for revolution, while the latter painstakingly revised the first volume of *Capital* so that it might be employed as a tool in the struggles of the international working class. Whatever the vicissitudes of actual history, Marxism will remain its most powerful theory until it is displaced in the court of social-scientific inquiry by another. Until that day arrives, Marxist cultural workers have quite enough to do simply in showing how class and class struggle, ideology and the commodity form, enter into and determine the aesthetic productions of particular societies at certain historical moments. Jameson's own work accomplishes just this. That it does so on behalf of an ideological commitment to the future does nothing to negate its status as part of the scientific discourse of the present.

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## A Reply to David Edgerton

In his article 'Liberal Militarism and the British State' (NLR 185, January–February 1991), David Edgerton questions certain facts, calculations or interpretations of mine in my book *The Audit of War* about the British aircraft industry between the wars and during the Second World War. Let me take his points one by one.

First. Edgerton does not agree with me that the British aircraft industry in the 1920s and early 1930s was kept alive by a trickle of orders from the Air Ministry, its civil side being backward compared with, say, the German or American or Dutch. But on p. 5 of M.M. Postan's official history, *British War Production* (1952), we read: 'With financial provisions and new output at a very low level, the Air Ministry had great difficulty in maintaining its industrial reserves [circa 1934]. The aircraft firms, including the principal engine firms, found themselves in a position of chronic penury . . . very few could have survived without the tutelage of the Air Ministry . . . [which] had to ration out all new work among some sixteen substantial aircraft firms . . . But for the time being the diet, though just sufficient to keep the bulk of the firms alive, was too meagre to enable them to keep pace with the aircraft industry abroad, especially in the United States.' At this period the British aircraft industry manufactured ~~no~~ civil or military aircraft of monoplane all-metal construction, like the Junkers 52 or the Douglas DC1, and its exports only consisted of light aircraft of obsolescent technology.

Second. Edgerton questions my comparative figures of British, German and American productivity in aircraft in 1944, noting that the figure I gave for the workforce directly employed by the airframe and engine firms (510,000) was taken from a Cabinet Committee memorandum in 1943. In point of fact, this figure (the only one I have found relating to the workforce directly employed in the industry, as opposed to that working for the Ministry of Aircraft Production; that is, including sub-contractors and so forth) is dated November 1943, and Postan points out on p. 313 of his book that 'the spectacular output of early 1944 could be connected to the high labour intakes of later 1943.' In any case, Edgerton ignores the further evidence I cite (p. 321, footnote 24), in which a Ministry of Aircraft Production calculation in March 1944 reckoned that with British productivity it would take 17,000 man-hours to produce a Heinkel III, as against the published German figure of 12,000; and 4,300 man-hours to produce a Messerschmitt 109G, as against the German figure of 3,900.

Third. Edgerton quotes Richard Overy's book *The Air War 1939–1945* to demonstrate how the German aircraft industry was just as prone (if not more so) to the obstructiveness of craft unions with regard to 'dilution' and flow-line production methods. But Overy is here referring to 1939–41, ~~not~~ 1943–44. In his book *Goering: the Iron Man*

(pp. 190–91) he shows how output at Messerschmitt and Junkers rose by some 50 per cent in 1941–42, although numbers employed actually fell, while at Henschel the number of skilled workers declined from 45 per cent of the workforce in 1939 to only 11 per cent in 1943.

I do not, therefore, find Edgerton's points proven. To offer a more general criticism of his article, it seems to me to exemplify 'academic' writing at its most pedantically boring, with almost as much footnotery as text, an awful lot of 'concepts' and neologisms, and a preference for conducting a debate about other people's interpretations *à la* the seminar room, rather than writing in terms of real-life operational problems.

\* \* \* \* \*

*David Edgerton replies:* Barnett's first point restates the position I was attacking; his second does not challenge my central point that his comparative productivity calculation was wrong and misleading. I ignored the additional evidence he cites so as not to appear too nit-picking—the relevant PRO file makes clear the figures are dubious. On the third point, I actually say that German workers resisted dilution 'until 1944' and Overy makes clear that at the beginning of the war British productivity was ahead of German. My points stand. Since I thought they might be contentious I tried to furnish the references necessary to substantiate them. My short, non-'academic' *England and the Aeroplane: An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation* (Macmillan) gives the reading public an account of 'real-life operational problems' very different from that provided by Barnett.

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## **DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA?**

John Saul

**The ANC Put to the Test**

Robert Brenner/  
Mark Glick

**The Regulation School and the  
West's Economic Impasse**

Avan McCormack

**Japan's Leisure Industry**

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✦ Prior to the eruption of the 'Inkathagate' scandal it seemed everything was going Pretoria's way. The ANC was suffering serious losses, the townships were terrorized and divided, yet at the same time this was all supposedly the outbreak of spontaneous communal conflicts or the work of a rival movement—so sanctions were lifted and De Klerk hailed as a peacemaker and the man who had got rid of apartheid. The ANC alleged that it was the victim of a vicious campaign, in which Inkatha was guilty of gratuitous assaults and lent its cover to death squads drawn from the security services. In these clashes ten thousand people died, most of them because of their association with the ANC. But Western opinion seemed little troubled and took at face value the solemn assurances of De Klerk and Pik Botha as they deplored communal strife and indignantly denied stories of official collusion.

'Inkathagate' has been deeply embarrassing for both the government and Inkatha, and to a lesser extent even to those wilfully credulous Western observers who took so much on trust. The hand of the ANC has certainly been strengthened. But, as John Saul argues in this issue, the revelations in themselves do not undo the effects of the terror campaign. During this whole first phase of supposed legality the ANC has been greatly hampered in building the powerful mass organization that it needs for future contests with the government. For his part De Klerk has now been accorded credit by the Western press for removing Malan and Vlok from the security ministries, though they remain in the Cabinet. Yet, as Mandela has insisted, the responsibility of De Klerk and Botha for the strategy of covert attack is itself so great as to rule them out as persons appropriate to preside over negotiations to dismantle the structures of white power. John Saul's detailed examination of the project of the De Klerk government shows it to be profoundly compromised. On the one hand it has financed underhand violence; on the other it dreams of staving off full civic equality for the black population and of conserving a series of crucial white privileges. Saul suggests that the present conjuncture in South Africa, which is both transformed and menacing, will put the ANC's new leadership and strategy to a critical test.

✦ No intellectual task is more important today than that of understanding the unstable workings of the capitalist economies which rule the destinies of the world's peoples. Over the last decade or more, the work of the French Regulation School has furnished an influential basis and source of concepts for tackling this task. Michel Aglietta's path-breaking work *The Theory of*

*Capitalist Regulation* developed a systematic account of phases of capitalist development defined in terms of their specific labour process, matching structure of demand, and resulting regime of accumulation. The Regulationist approach moved away from abstract schema of economic analysis, whether Marxist or neoclassical, and focused on the specific combination of institutions and practices that promoted or blocked economic development in different epochs, social formations and regions. In this issue of the Review Robert Brenner and Mark Glick critically assess the achievement of the Regulation School. They question whether it furnishes a coherent and empirically sustainable history of the US economy and whether it correctly specifies either the logic of 'Fordism' or the crisis of the supposedly 'post-Fordist' capitalist epoch today. Some key Regulationist theses, they suggest, may unwittingly reflect French peculiarities rather than a capitalist norm. Brenner and Glick communicate a keen sense of the realities of competition in a world of failed monopolies, and are sceptical that the momentum of accumulation can be restored through some new combination of Keynesianism, welfare and participatory work processes. This essay is not only a sustained challenge to the Regulation School but, in its own right, a bold attempt to grasp the laws of motion and antecedents of late-twentieth-century capitalism.

Japanese economic performance is usually discussed either in terms of the secrets of its superior productivity or its characteristic commercial organization. In this issue Gavan McCormack looks at Japan's new leisure industries, and in particular at the golf complexes which loom large in Japanese business culture and claim immense tracts of the most desirable land.

Cindy Sherman's photographs of herself each redolently evoke a story of which we will ever know only one frame. Sherman's work has sometimes been understood as merely reflecting the obsessive self-referentiality and depthlessness of the postmodern. Yet Laura Mulvey shows in this issue that there is both depth and development in Sherman's work, and that across its different periods it enacts a story of masquerade and degradation of great aesthetic power and psychological insight. Our reviews section also includes considerations of Alan Sinfield's *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain* and a pointed discussion by Bruce Robbins of the demagoguery sparked off by campus attempts to broaden civilization courses and establish a multicultural etiquette.

We regret to inform our readers that we have been obliged to raise our cover price and subscription rates effective from this issue—we hope readers will agree that, with several extended issues each year, NLR remains exceptional value.

## South Africa: Between 'Barbarism' and 'Structural Reform'

It is easy to lapse into reformism now, socialism (whatever that might mean) being in retreat on so many fronts. On much of the Left, the language of 'reasonableness' replaces the language of revolution, with those who conform to the nostrums of 'Marxism-Leninism' and/or 'Trotskyism' seeming more antiquated and naive—more 'ultra-leftist'—than ever. Certainly in South Africa the present reality casts a dark shadow over these latter enthusiasms, any neat juxtaposition of 'reform' and 'revolution' sounding increasingly beside the point. Indeed, despite the advances epitomized in last February's dramatic unbanning of the opposition movements and the release of Nelson Mandela, we are still very far from the future prophesied by Sweezy and Magdoff when, at the height of the insurrection of the mid 1980s, they defined South Africa as 'the only country with a well-developed, modern capitalist structure which is not only "objectively" ripe for revolution but has actually entered a stage of overt and seemingly irreversible revolutionary struggle.'<sup>1</sup> In both the short and the longer term, the way forward to a more

egalitarian South Africa presents far more complicated challenges than any easy invocation of the need for a 'worker's party' and the urging of some kind of maximalist confrontation with capital can hope to resolve.<sup>2</sup>

In the short term? Witness the difficulties of the current political moment, one that defines itself around 'negotiations' and the process of shaping a new constitutional dispensation. This is the moment that many saw, in the enthusiasms of last February, as bearing the promise of (minimally) a real deracialization of capitalism and (potentially) a great deal more. Now this process itself appears flawed, grievously if not fatally, with some of those who most starkly juxtaposed the danger of 'mere reform' to the drive for revolution wondering aloud whether even meaningful reform is possible in the present conjuncture.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, we glimpse here a concern that must haunt any approach to contemporary South Africa. For there is, currently, a simultaneity of two distinct moments—the negotiations moment, the post-apartheid moment—in the South African historical process, a simultaneity that both clouds analysis and compromises action. Thus, even as South Africans press forward to shape the post-apartheid dispensation, they are dragged back, brutally, into the present, where continuing stalemate over the modalities of 'democratization' has created space for the grimmest of barbarisms—all too familiar to us from an endless spate of newspaper accounts of the 'killing fields' that South Africa's townships have become. Although almost worn smooth through over-use, Gramsci's epigram nonetheless rings cruelly true of contemporary South Africa: 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears.'

And what if the new cannot, in fact, be born; if the morbidity of the interregnum merely shows South Africans the face of their own future? We must countenance this possibility in the present article, yet, at the same time, avoid becoming fixated with it. In the immediacy of the moment South Africans must, indeed, struggle to counter the pull towards chaos in their country—the pull towards 'Lebanization' (as a number of sage South African observers would have it). But the best of South African militants are also struggling to build a future beyond the interregnum; to divine, to begin to shape, the

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<sup>1</sup> Paul M. Sweezy and Harry Magdoff, 'The Stakes in South Africa', *Monthly Review*, vol. 37, no. 6, April 1986, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> See, as examples, Alex Callinicos, *South Africa between Reform and Revolution*, London 1988; David Kitson, 'Is the sACP really communist?', *Work in Progress (WIP)*, no. 73, March/April 1991; and Adam Habib, 'The sACP's Restructuring of Communist Theory: A Shift to the Right', *Transformation*, no. 14, 1991. Thus Callinicos, too abstractly but with characteristic clarity and ample documentation, urges on his readers the claims of 'Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution' and, against ANC/sACP strategy, the need for a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'; Habib, a member of South Africa's Workers' Organization for Socialist Action (wOSA) concludes that, contrary to present sACP practice, 'the vision of the classless society can only truly be brought into realization if our theories, strategies and tactics are derived from the rich tradition of authentic Marxism-Leninism' (p. 79).

<sup>3</sup> See, for an early example of this mood, Alex Callinicos, 'Can South Africa be Reformed?', *International Socialism*, no. 46, Spring 1990.

parameters of a new, post-apartheid South Africa. True, even a democratization of South Africa that remained narrowly political would be a useful achievement in the context of the country's sad history and glowering present. Yet if this levelling impulse were not to be pressed forward to redress the socioeconomic inequalities that have been inherent in South Africa's brand of racial capitalism, any new 'freedom' would quickly be rendered very formal indeed for the vast mass of the black population.

In fact, as we shall see, most of the key actors in South Africa now pay at least lip service to this latter premiss. But what has any such imperative come to imply for the Left *per se*? Not, for the most part, any very precipitate plunge into full-blown social revolution. Rather, at its most relevant the Left seems to be groping towards something we might choose to call 'structural reform'. In effect, this means applying to South Africa a distinction once delineated by André Gorz between a 'genuinely socialist policy of reforms [and] reformism of the neo-capitalist or "social-democratic" type': 'If immediate socialism is not possible, neither is the achievement of reforms directly destructive of capitalism. [Yet] those who reject all lesser reforms on the grounds that they are merely reformist are in fact rejecting the whole possibility of a *transitional strategy* and of a process of transition to socialism.'<sup>4</sup> But what, within such a transition, is to distinguish 'structural reform' from mere 'reformism'?

There are two chief attributes. One lies in the insistence that any reform, to be structural, must not be comfortably self-contained (a mere 'improvement'), but must, instead, be allowed self-consciously to implicate other 'necessary' reforms that flow from it as part of an emerging project of structural transformation.<sup>5</sup> In Gorz's words, any 'intermediary reforms... are to be regarded as a means and not an end, as dynamic phases in a progressive struggle, not as stopping places.'<sup>6</sup> Secondly, a structural reform cannot come from on high;

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<sup>4</sup> André Gorz, 'Reform and Revolution', *Socialism and Revolution*, New York 1973, p. 141. This important essay seems even more widely relevant now than when it was written (in France in the 1960s).

<sup>5</sup> Gorz is alert to the paradox that such a project must both have some sense of its overall trajectory ('the workers' movement [must be] fully aware from the start of the nature of the stakes it is playing for') and yet not unduly prejudge the trajectory of the struggle that is being developed. 'The error [of maximalist tendencies] consists in postulating that every engagement must now be entered upon with the clearly stated socialist intention that its ultimate aim is the overthrow of the system. This amounts to affirming that the revolutionary intention must *precede* the struggle and supply its impetus. That is a non-dialectical position which evades the problem by treating it as though it were already solved. For the fact is that the socialist resolve of the masses never springs out of nothing, nor is it created by political propaganda or scientific demonstration. Socialist resolve is built in and by the struggle for feasible objectives corresponding to the experience, needs and aspirations of the workers' ('Reform and Revolution', pp. 133-4). He does, of course, see a role for 'leaders' (even a 'vanguard of the workers' movement') who should be more alert than others to 'an already existent socialist intention'. But 'this intention will not be asserted by speeches and revolutionary propaganda but by ability to grade the objectives, to raise the struggle to a constantly higher plane and to set "intermediary" targets... which must necessarily be surpassed as soon as they have been achieved' (p. 134).

<sup>6</sup> Gorz, 'Reform and Revolution', p. 148.

instead it must root itself in popular initiatives in such a way as to leave a residue of further *empowerment*—in terms of growing enlightenment/class consciousness, in terms of organizational capacity—for the vast mass of the population, who thus strengthen themselves for further struggles, further victories. 'The emancipation of the working class can become a total objective for the workers, warranting total risk, only if in the course of the struggle they have learned something about self-management, initiative and collective decision—in a word, if they have had a foretaste of what emancipation means.'<sup>7</sup>

Why does some variant of 'structural reform' have particular ideological resonance in South Africa? What are the signs that this kind of 'transitional strategy' is emerging there? And what forces are most likely to sustain such a strategy? These are questions to which I will return, although one strand of the argument may be anticipated here. For there is still something to the notion articulated by Stephen Gelb and myself a decade ago—at the moment when the ANC had begun successfully to reclaim its historic primacy within the camp of popular resistance—that 'just as the ANC is at the centre of things, so the centre of things is increasingly within the ANC: the continuing dialectic between this movement and the considerable revolutionary energies at play within the society has become the single most important process at work in South Africa's political economy.'<sup>8</sup> Nor was Robin Blackburn incorrect recently to find in South Africa, and precisely in 'the South African UDF/ANC', one of his 'new proletarian and new left movements' that 'have a strong relationship to new trade unions without conforming to the old labourist model' and that hold some positive promise of 'transforming the historic programmes of the Left'.<sup>9</sup>

However, as I argued several years ago in these pages, this reality has never been unproblematic nor free of contradiction.<sup>10</sup> Now this is all the more true. Indeed, the ANC has proven to be weaker, less clear-sighted, than might have been anticipated, and the dialectic between it and 'the considerable revolutionary energies at play within [South African] society' less straightforward than might have been hoped even some fifteen months ago. But if the ANC is very far from being a 'revolutionary vanguard' in any familiar sense of the term, this need not mean the political process that swirls around it is without the kind of revolutionary promise Blackburn alludes to. As we will see, it is within this very swirl that one does, indeed, find the most important of the diverse centres of creativity that continue to shine out through the gathering gloom in South Africa—as well as the most likely architects of any transformed 'programme of the Left' there.

All this becomes possible if a collapse into chaos is avoided in South Africa. Of course, even then there would not be clear sailing for these

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> John S. Saul and Stephen Gelb, *The Crisis in South Africa* (revised edn), New York 1986, p. 200.

<sup>9</sup> Robin Blackburn, 'Fin de Siècle: Socialism after the Crash', *NLR* 185, January–February 1991, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> John S. Saul, 'South Africa: The Question of Strategy', *NLR* 160, November–December 1986.



potential bearers of a 'structural reform' approach to socialist transition (the rubric I would offer as best epitomizing the most promising possibilities in that country). For the alternative to chaos could still very well be cooptation ('mere reformism') rather than transformation. Such is the strength of capital and entrenched privilege in South Africa that there will be a pull on actors, both within and without the ANC, to take, in the end, the line of least resistance vis-à-vis established power. Indeed, even some of the least compromised of popular leaders—the most promising architects of a 'transformed programme'—may have their militancy gradually eroded by having to live the half measures inherent in a 'structural reform' strategy and may find themselves sapped, ultimately, of the kind of nervy energy it takes, day in and day out, to so balance realism against risk as to keep radical possibilities alive.

There does remain a distinctive vibrancy and radical push at the base of South African society (despite the township wars) that should prove difficult for popular leaders to ignore. But will the latter be tempted, nonetheless, to rationalize 'necessary' compromises by blurring the fact it is class struggle they are engaged in? Thus Gorz, for all the circumspection of his discussion of a 'socialist strategy of reforms', keeps returning, in his important essay on the subject, to the fact that 'the bourgeoisie will never relinquish power without a struggle and without being compelled to do so by revolutionary action on the part of the masses.'<sup>2</sup> What is at stake, ultimately, is a 'trial of strength' and those popular forces in South Africa whose cumulative empowerment is seen to be so central to a project of 'structural reform' will ignore this at their peril. In fact, it is precisely concern about the real measure of the UDF/ANC's revolutionary seriousness in regard to such questions that move—in their least sloganistic moments—those who critique its undertakings from the left. However sceptical one may be about the realism and likely efficacy of the programmes and prognostications such critics offer as alternatives, this kind of concern deserves the most serious consideration. In the aftermath of the ANC's own July 1991 congress, and of recent revelations ('Inkathagate') that have greatly damaged the ANC's principal political antagonists, it is a good time to take stock of a political conjuncture with both hopeful and ominous features.

## I Explaining De Klerk

As I have argued previously (NLR 160, p. 5), the 'linkage between racial domination and capitalist exploitation is as potentially contradictory as it has been mutually reinforcing' during long periods of South African history. Moreover, since the 1970s and in a context of 'organic crisis', we have seen these two structures pull apart in various crucial ways, facilitating attempts by some in ruling circles to reform South Africa and deracialize its capitalist system—the better to defend this system's most essential features, needless to say. In part the roots of reform have had an economic logic. According to the line of analysis recently developed most fully by Stephen Gelb, the chief limitations upon South African economic development reflect a crisis

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<sup>2</sup> Gorz, 'Reform and Revolution', p. 135.

in the 'racial Fordist' accumulation regime—one premised initially on 'extending industrialization via the production of (previously imported) sophisticated consumer goods primarily for the white South African market'—that had spurred the country's postwar boom. Although economic crisis also reflected South Africa's vulnerability to international trends, it did produce a growing recognition of the need to break down racial restrictions on the Fordist link between mass production and mass consumption—to overcome the limits imposed by apartheid on the labour process and labour markets', in Gelb's formulation—in order to reactivate growth.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, slowly but surely business interests were working towards advocacy of an across-the-board 'normalization', in capitalist terms, of the South African economic system. And their resolve in this respect was brought into even clearer focus by international reaction to South Africa's crisis: both politically willed sanctions and those market 'sanctions' that sprang from global business's misgivings about the country's investment climate. Here, of course, economic reality intersected with political realities: popular resistance that, since the Durban strikes and Soweto uprising of the 1970s, could never quite be snuffed out by the apartheid state helped trigger both the international sanctions movement and declining investor confidence. Moreover, established power in South Africa became increasingly nervous about the proto-revolutionary link being forged within the popular movement between anti-racist democratic demands and anti-capitalist resentments. Under such circumstances, a project of taming rising trade-union demands and generalized political unrest by attempting to steer such pressures into bourgeois-democratic political institutions and industrial-relations regimes seemed increasingly attractive.

As Dan O'Meara has shown, this shift to reform was also facilitated by a new stratification of the Afrikaner community, long-time bedrock of support for apartheid policy and for the National Party.<sup>13</sup> As anticipated by some of its architects, NP rule had indeed produced Afrikaners capable of competing successfully with English business; ironically, the emergent entrepreneurial and professional strata who did succeed along such lines began to find they had as much or more in common with their class counterparts across the (intra-white) ethnic divide as with their fellow Afrikaners at lower rungs of the ladder. It was this 'new Nat' leadership cadre that, as the 1980s wore

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Gelb, 'South Africa's Economic Crisis: An Overview', draft introductory chapter to a volume on the South African economy being prepared by the trade-union-linked 'Economic Trends' group, read in manuscript. In its early phase, the revision of 'racial Fordism' sought 'by linking productivity improvements to wage increases for a well-trained, fully urbanized black industrial workforce . . . to both boost the size of the overall domestic consumer market (especially for durable and semi-durable goods), while simultaneously domesticating the emergent black trade unions.' Gelb sees this deconstruction of 'racial Fordism' as continuing apace throughout the 1980s—albeit without conspicuous success in reviving the flagging South African economy—and, quite precisely, as underlying the current moment: 'The third phase . . . was ushered in by the dramatic developments of late 1989 and early 1990, which opened the way to the ending of apartheid—the last important element of the old growth model' (ibid).

<sup>13</sup> Dan O'Meara, 'The Crisis of Apartheid and the Politics of the South African State', draft manuscript, 1990, among other of his recent writings.

on, aligned itself—very much against the statist pull of party tradition—ever more enthusiastically with the most extreme free-market nostrums of supply-side liberalism (including a drive to privatize South Africa's large state sector, which sprang as much from ideological fetish as from attendant concerns to raise revenue, or, more recently, to keep assets out of the hands of any successor majority-rule government). Gradually the party began to cut itself away from its old constituency: secure in their economic privilege the new Nats inclined to leave the cause of defending fully institutionalized racism to strata more immediately vulnerable to black advance—the marginalized white farmers of the platteland and the remnants of the white working class who have come, in turn, to provide the social base of the Far Right.

One could easily overstate this case, however. Even in the business community only a handful—the Premier Group's Tony Bloom and Barclay's Chris Ball (both of whom have since left South Africa), the Permanent's Bob Tucker and the Consultative Business Movement's Christo Nel—could suggest the most far-reaching brand of deracialization of South Africa to be advisable, such advanced thinkers considering the strength of capital to be sufficient in and of itself to discipline (and/or seduce) virtually any black-majority successor regime to its purposes. However, the business consensus generally remained rather less confident than this, often content merely to bide its time on the reform question. How much more has this been true of Nationalist politicians, on even the most yuppified of whom the pull of the traditional national-cum-racial project can often still be felt.

Hence, the schizophrenic witches' brew of reform and repression that defined state policy in the 1980s. The brutal crushing of the 1984–86 insurrection, which succeeded, momentarily, in derailing the resistance movement, lent further weight to a growing centralization and militarization of state power in South Africa: the president's 'State Security Council' continued to eclipse the Cabinet, and a new 'National Security Management System' began to pre-empt and overdetermine conventional administrative structures. Yet accompanying dollops of reform were also felt to be essential to the coopting of black leaders and/or the winning of 'hearts and minds' of the populace.<sup>4</sup> Inadequate to the purpose of draining off the high level of popular resistance that boiled just beneath the surface of repression, such measures helped seal the fate of the 1980s' quintessential political figure, *die Groot Krokodil*, President P.W. Botha. Summoned to the cause of reform but a National politician of the old school, this profoundly security-oriented, long-time Minister of Defence was, in the end, torn apart by the contradictory claims history had placed upon him.

### De Klerk's Flawed Deracialization Project

Certain related contradictions find expression within De Klerk's

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<sup>4</sup> The attempted greening of certain persistent township trouble spots such as Mamelodi and Alexandra provides instructive cases in point in this regard, cases well documented in Andrew Borsaine, 'Security Management Upgrading in the Black Townships', *Transformation*, 8, 1989; and Karen Jochelson, 'People's Power and State Reform in Alexandra', *WZ*, no. 56/7, November–December, 1988.

project. Still, De Klerk did introduce something new.<sup>5</sup> Far more assertively than his predecessor he has sought to take the offensive in shaping a new political terrain—albeit in ways favourable to his own purposes. More fully than Botha could do, he sensed the stalemate created by the National Party's repressive checkmating of the near insurrection of 1984–86 to be unviable—fragile politically, formidably expensive, unconvincing to potential investors and other concerned parties abroad. In particular, the hunger strikes, the widespread defiance of bannings and segregation notices, the industrial action and worker stay-aways, in short the entire spectrum of assertions that defined 1989's revival of the popular-resistance movement (or 'Mass Democratic Movement' as it came to be known), made it clear the government could not hope to stabilize things in the same old way. Moreover, renewed resistance could only give fresh life to the international pressures referred to above.

Now the White House, hounded at home about sanctions, pressed Pretoria to signal new flexibility in its policies—even as South Africa's good friend Margaret Thatcher counselled the need to 'normalize' things in a more readily defensible way. A more subtly political approach also recommended itself just as those who favoured the hardest of lines in South Africa were themselves on the defensive in ruling circles—mere repression a failed policy inside South Africa, the stunning military stalemating of South Africa by joint Angolan–Cuban forces a reality in Angola, a ceding of ground to an erstwhile 'terrorist' enemy (SWAPO) proceeding relatively seamlessly in Namibia. Almost simultaneously, world events further discredited the apartheid regime's old game of claiming to be a buffer against the global 'red menace', while the very collapse of the Communist bloc served to raise international expectations regarding the necessity for a democratic outcome in South Africa.

It was in this context that De Klerk—formerly a denizen of the centre-right of the NP—took the bold steps of February 1990, seeking to break the political log jam by inviting exiled political organizations in from the cold. Moreover, he has continued to promise (and in part deliver) a deracialization of South Africa: he has formally opened the National Party to non-white members, for example, and in February of this year announced the imminent repeal of such apartheid legislative foundation stones as the Land Act, the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act.<sup>6</sup> Such steps were dramatic, and enough to win him kudos abroad and a significant waning of the sanctions impetus (in the European Community and the United States, if not yet in the Commonwealth). One could easily underestimate the novelty of the terrain upon which the popular movement now finds itself. Yet the fact remains—the old Adam in the new Nat—that De Klerk's political intentions seem to remain dangerously limited.

<sup>5</sup> The next few paragraphs draw on my article 'Free at Last: The Next Round in South Africa', *Monthly Review*, vol. 42, no. 3, July–August 1990; note that 'De Klerk' is used in part as a kind of shorthand for the inchoate and rather contradiction-ridden group that centres around President F.W. de Klerk and currently hold the reins of formal power in South Africa.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Laurence, 'De Klerk ready to bury last of apartheid laws', *The Guardian*, 2 February 1991.

Thus, in one of his very first utterances (to Ted Koppel on ABC-TV's *Nightline*) after Mandela's release, De Klerk still mouthed the old Nationalist line that seeks to present South Africa as a 'multinational' amalgam (with all those 'tribes' whose interests must be accommodated). And, phrased with greater or lesser subtlety, considerable talk about the imperative of protecting 'group rights' has continued to surface in official circles, prompting O'Meara to conclude recently that 'De Klerk and his colleagues quite simply will not commit themselves to the establishment of a non-racial democracy. Thus the constitutional plan they have now bruited about as their likely "offer" when that stage of the negotiations process is reached, still provides for a strong white veto through the careful structuring of the proposed new parliament's second chamber. This reflects deep-felt concerns on the part of Afrikaners about protecting their own culture and language, as well as more prosaic concerns about defending certain important aspects of economic/racial privilege against any unchecked majority certain to be both poor and black.'<sup>17</sup>

Still half-hearted on reform: we must return to this matter since it is from some such starting point that De Klerk has chosen to deal with the ANC. But the limits that may mark De Klerk's intentions bear noting here since much current media analysis tends to explain his half measures as reflecting merely a bow to the white Right. Not that those to the right of De Klerk—who, undeterred by nuance and smelling betrayal, resent the ground he is breaking—comprise an insignificant force. One may doubt their electoral potency (even assuming there will ever be another white election); at least for the moment, analysts tend to grant them, at best, 30 to 35 per cent. Moreover, the chief opposition party, Treurnicht's Conservative Party, seems likely, however reluctantly, to play out the political game by the rules. There are others further to the right, however—Eugene Terreblanche's quasi-fascist AWB, for example—who feel no such constraint and who seem set to inflict considerable damage on their enemies during any process of transition to a new constitutional order. Most importantly, this white Right interpenetrates with the state's security apparatus—the police, the military—in ways that may already be of considerable significance.

The white Right also has its black counterpart, the residue of previous attempts by the regime to divide and rule the subject population. One thinks of the venal layer of 'Coloured' and Asian politicians, far from popular within their own communities, who staff non-white structures linked to the tricameral parliament, and of various Bantustan and black-township council intermediaries of white power who have developed their own stake in the limited realms of authority allotted to them. Of course, councillors have found themselves under siege in their own communities; and Bantustan leaders, too, have felt the hot breath of popular agitation at their backs. Crude autocrats like the

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<sup>17</sup> See Dan O'Meara/John S. Saul, 'The High Costs of Stalemate: Dan O'Meara on South Africa', in *Southern Africa Report* (Toronto), vol. 6, no. 3, May 1991, p. 11, this article represents my own summary of the central themes of O'Meara's various talks in the Toronto area after a recent visit to South Africa, talks that have helped shape my own understanding of developments within the white polity.

Mantanzimas in the Transkei and Lennox Sebe in the Ciskei (with Mangope of Bophuthatswana saved only by direct South African armed intervention) have been swept aside by their militaries, these militaries in turn being forced to accommodate themselves, to greater or lesser degree, to the demands of the ubiquitous, South Africa-wide popular movement.

Thus the Ciskei's Brigadier Oupa Gqozo both renounces 'independence' and cedes new room for manoeuvre to trade unions whose activity was violently crushed by his predecessor, while the Transkei's Major-General Holomisa, a public advocate of the ANC's cause even before February 1990, now enthusiastically domiciles within his borders ANC military commander Chris Hani and—it appears—important residues of the armed wing of the ANC. This does not mean that such homeland leaders—with their considerable bureaucratic and military constituencies within the homelands—will not be heard from again, and perhaps in less than progressive ways, as the jockeying for position regarding a new constitutional dispensation proceeds. Nonetheless, it is other black denizens of the apartheid structures that have come to inflict the most acute damage on the cause of democratic change. One thinks here of the vigilantes of the townships and, most problematic of all, of the Kwazulu Bantustan's Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and his Inkatha movement.

### The Role of Inkatha

The counter-revolutionary role of those notables who have clustered around township structures in South Africa—councillors, business types, black police personnel, alongside such lumpen elements as these latter can recruit to be the footsoldiers of vigilante undertakings—has been all too visible in South Africa ever since the failed insurrection of the mid 1980s.<sup>25</sup> But the most recent round of violence in South Africa's townships has reached particularly frightening and seemingly uncontrollable proportions. Increasingly, too, this violence seems merely overdetermined by context, a cruel but ineluctable index of the way blacks have been forced to live for decades by apartheid and of the social distemper bred by such realities. And yet the emergence of this wasting syndrome has been anything but spontaneous; in its main thrust it has had to be politically constructed. Its principal architect? Gatsha Buthelezi, covertly prompted and subsidized by forces within the government and state.

Accepting participation in the government's Bantustan scheme in 1970 (although consistently refusing 'independence' thereafter) Buthelezi revived a moribund Zulu nationalist organization, Inkatha, in 1975 in order to provide a political base for himself. Painted as a moderate because of his capitalist leanings (including a firm rejection of any form of sanctions) and his dismissal of armed struggle (and indeed of most other militant forms of confrontation with the apartheid

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<sup>25</sup> See Nicholas Haysom, *Makungula: The Rise of Right-Wing Vigilantes in South Africa*, Johannesburg 1986; and Josette Cole, *Crossroads: The Politics of Reform and Repression, 1976–1986*, Johannesburg 1987.

state), he and his cronies proved, more or less from the outset, to be anything but moderate in the brutal manner of their consolidating a hold on power in KwaZulu. (Inkatha's extraordinary rape of the university campus at Ngoye in 1983 is merely one particularly graphic example of a far more general pattern.) It was from this Bantustan base that Buthelezi then made himself available for any political outcome that could further his apparently boundless personal ambition.<sup>29</sup>

In particular, he sought to position himself as a possible compromise candidate for the day when the contradictions of the apartheid system would finally dictate some bolder kind of reform. The discussions over a power-sharing model for Natal (orchestrated around the 'Buthelezi Commission' and within the KwaNatal Indaba) represented one earnest of this intention. Yet such was the strength of pan-South African nationalism within the black community that Buthelezi could never convincingly carry his tribal-tinged and conservative politics beyond Natal. Moreover, it became increasingly apparent throughout the 1980s that the rising Mass Democratic Movement—the chief protagonist of a broader national project—was also winning increasing support amongst the Zulu people itself. Faced with the possible eclipse of its position, Inkatha slashed back brutally at ANC/UDF/COSATU supporters in Natal.

It should be noted that the violence which surfaced so dramatically in Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere in 1988 and 1989 was between political groupings *within* the Zulu community. (It was not, that is to say, 'tribal violence' in any meaningful sense.) And it was largely initiated as a political tactic by Inkatha, now increasingly on the political defensive and attempting to reconsolidate its position by force of arms. Of course, 1990 brought even more bad news for Buthelezi: the recognition by 'world opinion' of the ANC's primacy within the black community and of its claim to coequal status with the government in negotiating the future of South Africa. With even De Klerk himself seeming to come to terms with this view, Buthelezi thus saw himself being shut out from the crucial early rounds of bargaining over a new constitution. He was no longer a preferred intermediary and, indeed, became increasingly fearful of a constitution that might not only ignore all his claptrap about 'power-sharing' but even sidetrack the prospect of recycling the Bantustan system—so long the chief underpinning of his power—in some kind of 'federal' system.

How, then, to get to the bargaining table before having to face the none too tender mercies of the ballot box? There was an answer: if no

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<sup>29</sup> On Buthelezi, see Gerhard Maré and Georgina Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and the Politics of 'Loyal Resistance'*, Johannesburg 1987; and Gatishe Buthelezi: *Chief with a Double Agenda*, London 1988 by the late, and much missed, Mzala. In a particularly insightful 1987 article ('The Chief', *NYRB*, 12 February 1987) Michael Massing already saw fit to present Buthelezi—the Jonas Savimbi of South Africa, as Massing characterizes him—as bent on brewing civil war; in this regard, Massing found special resonance in the statement made to him by one (unnamed) Buthelezi advisor: 'Over the long run, there's only one central political process in South Africa—the conflict between the ANC and Inkatha. And there can be only one victor in that conflict.'

longer quite credible, he could at least try to make himself indispensable. If you want a peaceful transition, he seemed to say, include me in, include me in or a great many more people will die. In some such mood Inkatha, in the latter part of 1990, carried its bloody tactics beyond Natal and into the Transvaal.

As we now know, the Republic's 'Minister of Law and Order', Adriaan Vlok, directly sponsored the resulting mayhem to the tune of several million rand. That the government should lend this degree of covert support was important to Buthelezi (although, as is now apparent, rather risky). Yet we should understand that, however ugly, his project has had some kind of social base, especially in the remote rural areas of Kwazulu where Inkatha's machine-style politics can dispense its patronage, where its closed and aggressive methods can serve to intimidate dissenters, and where its ethnic sloganeering possesses added resonance. This kind of politics has tended to play not nearly so well in the more sophisticated townships of Natal. Nonetheless, in the mushrooming shantytowns that now ring the formal townships, the notorious Inkatha 'warlords' have been able to establish some similar patterns of social control amongst a desperately impoverished and marginalized population. Moreover, this kind of warlord system seems to have found an echo in the tribally exclusive and isolated migrant-labour hostels of the Transvaal cities. It is from these hostels that Zulu men have been mobilized as the cutting edge of Inkatha's terror.

The ethnic charge of this project was real, of course, and, as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, encouraged other ethnic-based responses. The possible result: the kind of downward spiral of internecine struggle that has already begun to undermine the functioning of several hitherto strong unions in the Transvaal. This kind of politics can also exploit other faultlines in local communities, inter-generational tensions for example, the seeds for which have sometimes been sown by the unbridled activities of militant youth within the popular movement. Yet the class question remains pre-eminent: the most significant development of all, perhaps, is the pull towards Inkatha of that very network of local notables we have identified as the principal instigators of earlier rounds of vigilante-style activity.

Thus, as one former Inkatha central-committee member who now heads the Transvaal provincial authority's community development programme put the point, 'It has taken a long time but the message is now clear. If the ANC continues with its campaign (to remove government-created local authorities) it will meet organized resistance. The spines of the councillors have been stiffened by the words of Chief Buthelezi. They know they will now be supported by Inkatha.' The *Southscan* report that carries this quotation proceeds as follows: 'The process has already been at work in Alexandra, where Inkatha-ANC clashes in the past fortnight left 60 dead, and tensions continue to run high. In a confidential memorandum to his four council colleagues in advance of the fighting, nominated mayor Prince Mokoena said he was "allowing Inkatha into Alexandra... I am sick and tired of the civic and the ANC." Just days before the first killings, Mokoena



warned Moses Mayekiso, head of the ANC-aligned Alexandra Civic Organization and driving force behind the anti-council campaign in the Transvaal: "We are going to hit you."<sup>20</sup> Add to this pattern the various criminal elements who, amidst the resultant chaos, can find space to expand their activities (and even occasionally legitimize them under one political banner or another) and the South African picture begins to look very grim indeed.

However, equally important to the resonance Buthelezi's brutal project has gained are forces within the white community. Haysom and others have established a pattern, from the first appearance of the black vigilantes and throughout the country, of firm links between such vigilantes and the police and military present in the townships. Not surprisingly, in the current situation, it is Inkatha's undertakings that are particularly attractive to those right-wing whites who have a brief both to undermine the ANC and, more generally, to panic other whites, presented with the spectre of 'black anarchy', away from support for democratic reform. There has been some debate about the extent to which such right-wingers are minions of the state, to what extent they represent some shadowy 'third force'. Given the well-documented degree of police participation (alluded to above) in ultra-right political groups the distinction may not be of great importance. In any case, what can be confirmed quite unequivocally—from numerous first-hand accounts—is a pattern of police support for Inkatha's ravages in both Natal and the Transvaal, a pattern that ranges from blatant non-intervention to more active involvement in mobilizing and transporting death squads within the townships.

Well before the most recent dramatic revelations, it seemed clear that the involvement in the violence ran even deeper than that. Already, in 1990, a *Weekly Mail* report had documented the fact that, on at least one occasion (in 1986), an elite unit of Inkatha fighters was trained in guerrilla warfare by a division of the South African Defence Force at the Hippo Base in the Caprivi Strip.<sup>21</sup> Further evidence pointed to the ongoing training of Inkatha 'hit-men' by the SADF at camps in Kwazulu itself. And there were signs of collusion, in training and in general logistics, between these Inkatha forces and Renamo (the South African-backed wrecking crew that has inflicted such damage upon neighbouring Mozambique)—including suggestions that some Renamo units may actually have been actively involved with Inkatha in recent township offensives. Small wonder that the scorched-earth tactics of South African vigilantes—aimed at maximum social disruption and the brute physical intimidation of local populations—have come to resemble those of Renamo so closely. As *Southscan* summarizes the point: 'With some justification the ANC sees itself as the target of a sustained military campaign: those of the 3,000-plus victims of violence since the ANC's legalisation who have not been ANC members or supporters, have in the main been residents of communities demonstrating significant ANC support.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Southscan*, 22 March 1991.

<sup>21</sup> *Weekly Mail*, 21 September 1990.

<sup>22</sup> *Southscan*, 12 April 1991.

## Government-Sponsored Violence

Against this background the explosion of the 'Inkathagate' scandal in late July, following the publication of documentary proof that the Ministry of Law and Order had funded Inkatha campaigns, was scarcely a surprise. Nevertheless, the revelations, first published in the *Weekly Mail* in its issue of 19–25 July, should prove deeply damaging to Inkatha and to the government. Previously both parties had strenuously denied any collusion. De Klerk and Pik Botha had publicly deplored the township violence, even as their government was funding the forces behind it, while Buthelezi himself stands exposed as, in effect, a hired tool of the security services. Moreover, beyond the proven, and now admitted, payments made by the ministry to Inkatha lies the question of the huge subversion budget as well as highly circumstantial accounts of (for example) incidents where members of the South African armed forces have been used, in disguise, to terrorize communities that supported the ANC.

Was De Klerk the architect or the prisoner of the strategy of sabotage undertaken by the security services? Something of both, perhaps. He does indeed seem hamstrung, within the white community, in dealing with the military. True, his coming to power in the wake of Botha did signal a distinct civilianization of the white polity; very quickly, he moved to upend the State Security Council/National Security Management System structure. Yet, beyond this, De Klerk has shown little inclination to press the reigning securocrats hard regarding their day-to-day practices in harassing the popular movement, much less to move against Magnus Malan, Minister of Defence, old Botha crony, and the most unyielding and outspoken of hardliners within his Cabinet. When opportunities have arisen to deal with Malan—his implication by the Harms Commission in a whole range of 'dirty tricks', the exposure of his lies in parliament regarding illegal disbursement of funds—De Klerk has not seized them. De Klerk's critics also emphasize 'the extent to which the pattern of recent appointments—notably that of General Liebenberg to head the Defence Force, the very man who, as chief of the SADF Special Forces Command, had presided over the military destabilization of Mozambique and Angola—seems further to document De Klerk's disinclination to run too many risks in the interest of change.'<sup>23</sup>

Yet there are grounds for thinking De Klerk to be even more actively complicit in security-force activities than this suggests. De Klerk may indeed be uncertain as to just what mix of racial/ethnic privilege and capitalist socioeconomic structure he can and will defend, as he seeks to keep politically one jump ahead of the white right wing and simultaneously to contain and qualify the revolutionary potential implicit in an untrammelled expression of black opinion. It may also be that his

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<sup>23</sup> O'Meara/Saul, 'The High Costs of Stalemate', p. 12. Does De Klerk fear a coup? O'Meara argues that 'since the military's own alternative for dealing with the crisis—brutal repression—so visibly failed in [the] years immediately preceding De Klerk's coming to power, it may not feel quite confident or clear enough about an alternative agenda to chance such a step.' Nonetheless, the security establishment remains a potent player in South African politics.

decision to crack the prevailing mould of white South African politics and redefine the terrain of struggle was something of a leap in the dark. Still, if the rules of the game are new and rather unclear, it remains a game De Klerk intends to win. It has not been his intention to hand over power to the ANC on the latter's terms. Anything that weakens the ANC (and/or helps him cobble together the components of an alternative political network) might therefore be interpreted by him as pure gain.

In fact, this reading—one that finds De Klerk prepared, *in furtherance of his own purposes*, to grant both his security arm and Buthelezi's vigilantes room for manoeuvre—is also consistent with the pattern of tactics he has adopted in the post-February 1990 negotiations process. He has consistently dragged his heels on facilitating the resolution of such key pre-negotiations issues as the release of political prisoners and the indemnification of exiles. Indeed, he so finessed the ANC on such questions that the latter movement felt moved to concede a surprising amount of ground in order to keep the process alive. A case in point was its offering up, as part of last August's jointly agreed 'Pretoria Minute', of a unilateral abandonment of armed struggle—much to the consternation of many of its followers. And in the jockeying for position regarding more substantive negotiations over establishment of a framework for political transition, De Klerk has shown no inclination to embrace ANC demands for election of a constituent assembly and formation of a new interim government to implement the next steps. Instead, he seeks merely to expand the ring of 'consultation' amongst 'concerned parties', signalling his preference for a constitution-making process that would see the existing white government in the chair throughout.

### Weakening the ANC

Since its own December (1990) Consultative Conference the ANC has sought to rally in order to regain the initiative. Despite this, there can be little doubt that De Klerk has long managed to keep the ANC on the defensive, setting most of the terms for debate about change. Still, the question arises: will he prove, in the end, to have been too clever by half? February 1990 reflected a bold awareness on the part of the 'new Nats' of the centrality of the ANC to any attempt to restabilize South African politics. In working to weaken the ANC De Klerk has been walking a tightrope, and in doing so he may both be overestimating its actual strength and underestimating the need for a coherent political centre to the popular movement that can control the centrifugal pulls towards anarchy within South African society. De Klerk bought time with respect to the ANC, to be sure, but in the meantime the situation has not stood still. The vacuum created has also provided room for a range of 'morbid symptoms' to surface that beggar the imagination and begin to defy anyone's control: an internecine warfare within the black population that, whatever its origins, has taken on a grisly life and momentum of its own, a rising level of sheer criminality that, given fresh fuel by the frustration of initial hopes for change, is reaching catastrophic proportions. 'Like Gorbachev in a rapidly disintegrating Soviet Union, De Klerk too is running out of time. The one thing De Klerk requires most... is an ANC sufficiently strong to broker with him a restabilization of South African politics. At one level De Klerk knows this. How ironic

that he seems bound, simultaneously, to undermine the very ANC he needs so much.<sup>24</sup>

Is De Klerk overplaying his hand? How should we weight this factor alongside others in explaining the limits upon De Klerk's initiatives: his own political vulnerability within the white community (*vis-à-vis* the military, in particular), for example, and his own very divided feelings regarding the broad parameters of permissible reform. Moreover, O'Meara suggests an additional reason for a style of negotiation that seems, dangerously, to underestimate the need to legitimate the process of change in the eyes of the black population. How, after all, could De Klerk believe it possible that the kind of white veto he seems still to contemplate be sold to this population by the ANC (even in the unlikely event that it should seek to do so) or by anyone else?

Here O'Meara sees De Klerk as victim of the old Afrikaner fixation (shades of the mad scientist Verwoerd and his Bantustan scheme) with 'social engineering'. The new code word is 'elite-pacting', the notion that 'representative elites' can be brought together in negotiations to cut a more or less private deal above the heads of the populace—a fundamental misconception of black politics, needless to say, yet one reminiscent to O'Meara of the Afrikaners' similarly out-of-touch overestimation of the electoral chances of a deeply compromised Bishop Muzorewa *vis-à-vis* Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, or of the viability of the various alternatives to SWAPO that they attempted to cobble together in Namibia over the years. The result: one more ingredient of stalemate, a gap between the maximum De Klerk is prepared to grant and the minimum the popular movement can accept. Perhaps this is stalemate at a higher level than in the Botha period, but it is stalemate nonetheless, one that invites the escalation of violence, the further disintegration of the economy, and even the slow melting away of majority white support for De Klerk.

Are cooler heads likely to prevail within De Klerk's own camp? Certainly the entrepreneurially minded—both within and without the National Party—can hope to profit little from a slide into 'barbarism', one that disrupts the domestic economy and continues to discomfit overseas economic interests that might otherwise wish to engage with South Africa. Nor has the last word been heard from the popular movement. Can the ANC, in particular, hope to shift the terms of the current political equation? To this question we must turn in the second section of this article. But we should remember, in passing, one other underlying reality. To the 'entrepreneurially minded' in the white power structure additional questions occur, questions about change, about the ANC and the popular movement more broadly defined, that reach beyond the negotiations moment—however traumatic and all-absorbing that moment may sometimes appear to have become.

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<sup>24</sup> O'Meara/Saul, 'The High Costs of Stalemate', pp. 12–13; the following two paragraphs also bear the imprint of O'Meara's reflections as summarized in this same interview/article. A particularly cold-blooded, 'realist' version of the 'pacting' model as it is being used to guide state practice in South Africa is provided by a leading Afrikaner intellectual, Willie Breytenbach, in his unpublished paper, 'South Africa, Towards 1994', 1990.

For there are other reasons to weaken the ANC and the popular movement than merely to force limits—whether advisedly or not—upon their constitutional demands. Even as the Ultra Right seeks to sidetrack these latter demands, others—notably those linked most closely to capital, local and international—seek to shape the socioeconomic structure of a post-negotiations, post-apartheid South Africa in line with their own interests and against too radical an outcome. This latter effort can also have a constitutional edge, of course: 'Hands off the economy' is one message inherent in any demand for a 'white veto', and there is talk from De Klerk's team of the need for some even more explicit constitutional guarantee of 'property rights'; perhaps this, too, is a good reason, from De Klerk's point of view, to 'soften up' the ANC during the negotiation process. Generally, however, the tactics in this sphere are subtler, not without threat (the tacit threat of capital's withdrawal from South Africa if too socialist an undertaking were to surface, for example) but with seduction and attempted cooptation already equally pronounced ingredients of a longer-term counter-revolutionary project. Needless to say, this is also the terrain upon which attempts to define a strategy of 'structural reform' must locate themselves, a subject that will provide the focus of the third section of this article.

## II Empowering the Movement

In an earlier article I sketched the steps by which the ANC had re-emerged at the centre of the resistance movement, broadly defined, by the mid 1980s.<sup>25</sup> This is a position the ANC has not relinquished, despite the great problems that currently confront it. At one level, of course, the ANC did fail to give adequate punch and focus to the energy manifested in the nationwide insurrection of 1984–86. The state crackdown, when it came, was a severe one, and manifestly staggered the popular movement. In the last stages of the insurrection there was much talk of moving beyond the proclaimed policy of rendering the townships 'ungovernable' to an attempt to build new institutions of 'people's power'. But the scourging of the townships of such embryonic possibilities was amongst the clearest goals of the government's Emergency measures, as was evident in the particularly severe repression meted out to a setting like Alexandra where, under the leadership of Moses Mayekiso, this process had gone furthest. And the ANC's promise, at its 1985 Consultative Conference, that it would adapt its military tactics in such a way as to defend more effectively centres of township resistance from state crackdown, proved impossible to deliver.

Not that the military dimension of the ANC's presence disappeared altogether, even if the attacks it sponsored remained much closer to the established format of 'armed propaganda' than was hoped. Indeed, the symbolic value of 'armed struggle' remained high. For example, a much publicized 1988 debate within the ANC about the relative merits

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<sup>25</sup> Saul, 'South Africa: The Question of Strategy'; for a somewhat fuller analysis of the immediate post-insurrection years than can be presented here, see my article, 'The Southern African Revolution', in *Socialist Register* 1989, London 1989.

of 'hard' and 'soft' targets had what, in any case, may have been its intended effect: it reminded the white populace that, without change, worse might be yet to come, even as it permitted the ANC to retain the moral high ground by ultimately rejecting, authoritatively, the soft-target approach. More generally, Barrell is undoubtedly correct in concluding that 'whatever the structural shortcomings of the internal underground and the post-1984 military campaign, MK [Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's military wing] had played a key role in precipitating the conditions which increasingly forced a hostile power-elite to contemplate alliance-building with the ANC.'<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the continuing strength of the apartheid state in sheer physical terms was by now perfectly manifest to the ANC/Umkhonto leadership, encouraging the latter increasingly to see armed action as merely one amongst a number of variables that could eventually undermine the regime.

Might not such variables, in fact, have drawn that regime—early or late—to the negotiating table? Of course, the ANC's readiness to negotiate has been seen by some on the Left (the 'Left' of both socialist and cultural-nationalist provenances) to be the ANC's mark of Cain: for 'negotiations' read 'sell-out', in this lexicon. But surely much depends on the strength the relevant parties bring to the table in any such negotiations. It is true that some sense of its own weakness did move the ANC to step up the pace on this front. As stated, it could not hope militarily to crush the apartheid regime. Moreover, the frontline states, battered beyond recognition by South Africa's destabilization tactics, were ever less available as rearguard bases for the ANC, while another of the movement's most important pillars of international support—the Soviet Union in particular, Eastern Europe more generally—was fading from the southern African scene.<sup>27</sup> Yet, simultaneously, the ANC drew confidence from the fact that the regime's repressive tactics had not worked. By 1989, such methods had manifestly failed either to solve South Africa's economic crisis or to buy it greater credibility abroad. Moreover, the revival of mass resistance in 1988–89, in the very teeth of the Emergency, encouraged the ANC to think that, once again, 'insurrection' might be brewing.

Let us recall the details. The unions were crucial, particularly COSATU, much the largest of the labour federations and the one aligned with the ANC and the UDF as part of the 'Mass Democratic Movement' (as

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<sup>26</sup> As Barrell continues, 'In turn, the de facto legalising of the ANC widened the space for revolutionary activity, as a counter to the heavy toll exacted from MK, the ANC generally, and other anti-apartheid activists after the declaration of a national state of emergency in June 1986 and the security forces' suppression of most township uprisings by mid-1987' (Howard Barrell, *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, Johannesburg 1990, p. 63). One should not underestimate both MK's 'key role' and the considerable heroism that went into its making its presence felt over the years—even if one accepts Barrell's overall argument that weaknesses internal to the ANCMK were at least as important as 'some of the most difficult conditions ever confronted by a revolutionary movement' in frustrating its stated goal that 'revolutionary armed struggle leading to a seizure of state power was both necessary and possible' (p. 71). On this subject, see also Stephen M. Davis, *Apartheid's Rebels: Inside South Africa's Hidden War*, New Haven 1987.

<sup>27</sup> On this subject, see my 'From Thaw to Flood: The End of the Cold War in Southern Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 50, 1991.

this grouping now came to be termed). The level of strike action was high, as was the level of mobilization on other fronts (the union-sponsored mass stay-away of 6–8 June 1988 against the draconian terms of the new Labour Relations Amendment Act saw some three million workers out in protest, and a related stay-away in September of the next year was also very successful). A highly visible 'defiance campaign' saw some individuals and organizations in effect 'unbanning' themselves while others carried out direct actions to desegregate beaches and hospitals or, as prisoners, mounted hunger strikes. In many townships consumer boycotts, rent strikes, and a range of militant youth activity continued to sustain themselves, even leading to a number of dry runs for negotiations, when white regional and municipal authorities found themselves compelled to treat over local issues with insistent civic associations. Perhaps these and other developments did not have quite the dimensions of the mass upsurge underway, more or less simultaneously, in Eastern Europe (a comparison much favoured by left critics of the ANC, despite the manifest difference in the regimes involved). But it had been the (unsuccessful) 1984–86 uprising that came closest, in South Africa, to that model. The 1988–89 revival of resistance seemed dramatic enough for the purposes of the moment.

If the ANC linked together this pattern of resistance, it was also experimenting with other kinds of linkages. For already, well before this most recent round of popular assertion, the ANC was being sounded out by actors traditionally closer to the other side of the political divide in South Africa. Its first meeting in Lusaka with a delegation of high-powered South African businessmen (including Gavin Relly, then chair of Anglo-American) had taken place as early as 1985, and other related meetings were to follow (including the dramatic 1987 session with a range of Afrikaner intellectuals and opinion leaders in Dakar). Moreover, in 1985 the ANC also began, self-consciously, to codify for itself the tactics that should inform such talks—as well as the preconditions for any negotiations that might ultimately take place with the government.<sup>28</sup> Such preconditions were further formalized in 1987 and, by August 1989, actually adopted by the OAU, at ANC request, as the 'Harare Declaration'. The movement's demands remained militant throughout: they demanded the lifting of repression in South Africa and looked to negotiations that would transform South Africa into a 'united, democratic and non-racial country'. Perhaps, when first articulated, these (then still unlikely) demands were primarily for international consumption—to enable the ANC to keep the initiative and to suggest to backers, real and potential, just how 'reasonable' it was prepared to be. But in part they were designed to keep a door open to the government for the moment when, the ANC projected, the hard reality of its situation would dawn upon it.

Even if its negotiations posture had been some time in the making, however, the ANC seemed more than a little stunned by the pace set by De Klerk once he seized upon the idea for his own purposes. True, even before Mandela's release the ANC had a sense of what was coming, predicting both that De Klerk 'in all likelihood will seek to move with speed in order to catch us unprepared and off-balance ...

<sup>28</sup> Howard Barrell, 'The Tactics of Talks', *WP*, no. 39, October 1985.

so that the initiative remains in his hand' and that, having done so, his 'pace would logically move down several gears as it did over Namibia from 1980—with the intention of wearing down its opposition with endless highly technical negotiations: haggling, in the expectation of a slow but steady demobilisation and demoralisation of the liberation movement's support base.'<sup>29</sup> As demonstrated in Section 1, this is precisely what has transpired in the period since that time. Yet the ANC, for all its suspicions concerning the traps that might await it on this new terrain, has so far seemed less able than De Klerk to master it effectively. The international support the ANC had concentrated so hard on winning in the past has proven difficult to carry forward. The ANC's domestic failures have been even more telling; if revived popular militancy was a key to forcing De Klerk's hand in the first place, translating that militancy into bargaining power for the present round has not happened as readily as might have been anticipated.

### The Lure of 'Elite-Pacting'

Has the ANC, in its own way, become trapped on the terrain of 'elite-pacting'? Despite its suspicions, the ANC may have expected too much from De Klerk and concentrated too uncritically on 'working things out' with him. After all, I have suggested that De Klerk, in outsmarting the ANC, might actually be outsmarting himself: the ANC had some reason to anticipate from De Klerk a much quicker and more straightforward *political* settlement than he has been prepared to offer. Perhaps, too, a misreading of motives has gone hand in glove with both a certain arrogance of approach and a closely related underestimation of De Klerk's guile. After all, Mandela had been engaged in some kind of negotiations with De Klerk from his prison quarters; what could stand in the way of his consummating those negotiations now that he was a free man? Add to this the frenzy of those overseas tours in the first months after Mandela's release that must have seemed to the ANC like a virtual coronation. How easy under such circumstances to overestimate international support even as, in retrospect, such support can be seen merely to have been peaking—and then receding, the Western media soon implying the apartheid problem to be solved and Western leaders inclining, increasingly, to give De Klerk the benefit of the doubt.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The first quotation is from senior ANC official, Alfred Nzo (*Guardian*, 9 January 1990), and the second, from 'ANC sources' in early 1989, is cited in David Niddrie, 'Negotiations . . . another site of struggle', *WIP*, no. 60, August–September 1989.

<sup>30</sup> The ANC may also have been lured, in this context, into an unrealistically 'maximalist' position on sanctions, Mandela insisting in his first trips abroad on their total enforcement until some all too easily unspecifiable moment of 'irreversibility' had been reached in the negotiations. In retrospect, and given that the alternative has been some slow, 'spontaneous' ebbing away of sanctions, a proposal to phase their withdrawal in lock step with an ascending series of concrete moves by De Klerk towards democratization might have enabled the ANC to make itself more of an arbitrator of the process. By the end of 1990 the ANC leadership seemed to have awakened to the wisdom of such a course, although too late to satisfy its own increasingly suspicious membership (at its December 1990 Consultative Conference) that this was not an unacceptable compromise. It was too late, as well, significantly to influence international actors—although the ANC's new posture had some positive influence on the February 1991 meeting of Commonwealth foreign ministers in London, and it remains true that sanctions have not completely disappeared as an influence on the calculations of De Klerk and his cronies.



Domestically, it may also be that the lure of 'pacting' has drawn out some of the ANC's worst instincts. Although the ANC maintained its integrity and coherence in exile, there was some pull towards autocratic tendencies in its practice. These tendencies are familiar enough as part of a continent-wide pattern within African nationalism, but in the ANC they were reinforced both by Stalinist inclinations derived from close interaction over the years with the South African Communist Party and by the seemingly inescapable fallout from hierarchical patterns inherent in underground work and militarization of the struggle.<sup>31</sup> There seem also to have been some costs, alongside the considerable benefits that have accrued, to Nelson Mandela's re-emergence to centrality within the movement and to the bringing to bear of his rather regal style on ANC politics. How else to explain the extreme defensiveness of much of the leadership concerning criticism of Winnie Mandela's often questionable practices and its insensitivity in making her head, amidst much protest, of the ANC's Social Welfare Department?<sup>32</sup> More importantly, such factors probably contributed to the ANC's apparent reluctance, throughout 1990, to unleash nationwide political mobilization and thus put the clout of popular protest behind its often desultory 'pacting' with De Klerk.

A closely related problem for the ANC has been its difficulties in consolidating a strong organizational presence inside South Africa. The return to South Africa of the exiled leadership has been anything but smooth: a *Southstar* correspondent has identified as the ANC's 'major difficulty' the 'domination of its leadership and executive core by elderly former exiles still unfamiliar with the dynamics of street-level politics and with its ability to provide hands-on leadership still unproven.'<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the prior unity has fragmented, as returning exiles, bound to unity in Lusaka, seek their own diverse political bases at home, and as ideological differences, hitherto papered over, become more salient. There is also the question of folding into one organization external and internal (principally UDF) structures and personnel. And how, indeed, to consolidate itself at the base. The UDF had not itself articulated the smoothest of links between central leadership and its constituent (township-based) parts. Moreover, such networks as did exist had been badly battered, at every level, by state repression. Throughout 1990 local resistances (rent strikes, consumer boycotts, marches and the like) continued across a broad front but so too did the ANC's 'inability to harness local grievances [and] to give actions national coherence' and to ensure that 'present localized campaigns, largely

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<sup>31</sup> At their most negative such tendencies may sometimes have turned very negative indeed. There is, for example, a disturbing ring of truth to the document prepared by a group of ANC dissidents and published in *Searchlight South Africa*, no. 5, July 1990, under the title, 'A Miscarriage of Democracy: The ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in Umkhonto we Sizwe'; this document specifies abuses of authority both inside the ANC's Quadro Camp in Angola and beyond.

<sup>32</sup> The other side of the coin: when, several weeks in advance of the judgement in her trial, Winnie Mandela ran for presidency of the ANC Women's League she was roundly defeated.

<sup>33</sup> *Southstar*, 18 January 1991.

reactive and very concrete in their focus... be fused into national political action.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, all such points of criticism must be qualified by awareness of context, specifically that of internal war inflicted on the ANC, as we have seen, both by actors linked to the state and by Buthelezi. Some critics asked whether better methods of work might have enabled the ANC alliance to penetrate the Zulu hostels with an alternative politics. Others asked, more controversially, whether something should have been done to get Buthelezi onside. But his asking price, in terms of compromises demanded regarding federal-cum-power-sharing constitutional gimmicks designed to safeguard his power base and that of his allies, would have been high were he finally to have bullied his way to the negotiating table in this manner. And who, in any case, could have anticipated Buthelezi's acting quite as ruthlessly as he has—or his obtaining quite so much official back-up for his misdeeds? Satisfaction that 'Inkathagate' has now incontrovertibly exposed the latter should not blunt our awareness of the toll on the ANC of the operations mounted against it: the ruthless intimidation of its potential mass base, the diversion of the energies of its already overstretched cadres into the endless firefighting of local skirmishes engineered by Buthelezi and the security establishment. The impact of such vicious instigation and sabotage was one more critical reason why, for example, a 1990 goal of one million ANC members had not produced many more than 100,000 members at the year's end (although that number was, in fact, to become far larger by mid 1991). As the *Weekly Mail*'s Anton Harber headlined a September 1990 story: 'The ANC begins to wobble as it nears the home straight.' His lead? 'Now that it has come out of the shadows, the new demythologized ANC seems to be a very troubled organization.'<sup>35</sup>

One could as easily overstate this case as understate it, however; as Harber himself concluded in the article referred to above, 'if there is cause for optimism in the ANC... it is that there is an extremely high level of internal debate and self-criticism over these issues'—just the kind of 'internal debate and self-criticism' that, only a few months later, was to surface usefully at the ANC's Consultative Conference of December 1990. Nor do all the democratic pressures felt by the ANC play themselves out within the organization itself. After all, much of the organization's present strength has sprung from its ability to cut against some of its own more autocratic temptations and risk development of a kind of creative tension between itself and a wide range of popular assertions inside South Africa. Most notable in this respect has been the interaction between the liberation movement and South Africa's vibrant and autonomous non-racial trade unions. Such

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<sup>34</sup> *Southscan*, 7 December 1990.

<sup>35</sup> Anton Harber, *The Weekly Mail*, 21–27 September 1990, p. 7. *Southscan* came to a similar conclusion at about the same time: 'the ANC is likely to end its first year of legality with neither the leadership nor the programme to extricate itself from the morass into which De Klerk has skillfully led it. In its current state the movement is virtually unrecognisable as the confident liberation movement which emerged from the shadows of illegality and exile on February 2' ('Criticism mounts as ANC bogs down in a talks strategy dictated by Pretoria', *Southscan*, 19 October 1990).

'creative tension' remains in play and it is particularly interesting to note the terms in which it has come to be comprehended in South Africa, terms that seek, quite self-consciously, to illuminate the kind of political work necessary to keep this 'tension' as alive and creative as possible.

In my earlier (1986) NLR article I sought to explore this tension by drawing on Ernesto Laclau's early work and suggested the ways in which, in the South African context, 'popular democratic' and 'proletarian' demands might 'reinforce and push each other forward'. This line of argument has been taken to imply the assumption of some kind of 'objective process' being at work to align nationalist/populist and working-class/socialist assertions quite unproblematically ('a Second International version of Marxism—proved bankrupt since 1914' is the way Alex Callinicos charitably phrases his criticism of me in this respect<sup>36</sup>). But the South African activists who have come actually to *live* this problematic fully realize that only class struggle can eventually produce an alignment in these terms.

### The Claims of 'Civil Society'

Class struggle—and democratic struggle. For alongside an awareness of the class provenance of diverse projects in South Africa there is also much talk within the movement, broadly defined, about the claims of (the term is used quite specifically) 'civil society'. Amongst the most articulate advocates of this way of thinking has been Moses Mayekiso, general-secretary of the radical National Union of Metalworkers, South Africa (NUMSA) and President of the Alexandra Civic Association. While also a member of both the ANC and the SACP, Mayekiso has insisted that solutions to South Africa's problems are not to be found exclusively in the realm of political parties. In a typical interview<sup>37</sup> he argued that 'civil society'—comprising a whole range of autonomous grass-roots organizations (trade unions, township-based civic associations and rural village committees, women and youth organizations)—must be built up, recruited for across party lines, and *empowered* in its own right. Mayekiso is already an articulate spokesperson for just such a role for the trade-union movement. Not surprisingly, he has now become a major player in the attempt to replace the UDF as it formally dissolves itself (in early 1991) into the ANC, with an independent organization of civic associations. As *Front File* accurately summarizes the mood: 'To ensure the existence of a "democratic culture" in a post-apartheid South Africa many grassroots activists, trade-union leaders and civic leaders want a new social movement to be created particularly to place the aspirations of remote, disadvantaged communities at the centre of the political debate.'<sup>38</sup> The newly minted CAST (Civic Associations of the Southern Transvaal) is seen, quite specifically, as prototype for the kind of

<sup>36</sup> Callinicos, *South Africa between Reform and Revolution*, p. 192.

<sup>37</sup> 'Building Civil Society: Moses Mayekiso Interviewed', *SAR*, vol. 6, no. 1, July 1990. Interestingly, Mayekiso was already arguing in this interview that negotiations 'even with the best of intentions of the ANC... could degenerate into an intra-elite bargaining process—if mass-based organizations are not further developed to focus steady, strong pressure upon all participants.'

<sup>38</sup> *Front File*, 'Mobilising the Civics', March 1991.

national organization that could press such township demands militantly even upon some future ANC government.

As is well known, a discourse premised on the claims of 'civil society' is a two-edged sword, much of its original historical thrust as a concept reflecting a liberal desire to keep the hands of the state off the marketplace. This is not the manner in which someone like Mayekiso uses the term. There is a genuinely radical charge to his model, one that acknowledges the invaluable leadership-cum-coordinative role to be played by the best kind of political party but sees autonomous popular organizations as necessary to 'push any political party that may find itself in power... push it for changes beneficial to the masses'. 'Because of the nature of the broad alliance of social forces that the ANC has come to represent,' states Mayekiso, 'there may well be limits beyond which the party cannot go' in terms of socialist policy—unless, that is, it is driven forward by the insistent voices of a well-organized civil society. Similarly, Albie Sachs, who, as a major architect of ANC constitutional thinking, has articulated eloquently the case for placing the protection of human rights at the front and centre in the movement's project, has been equally firm about the need to extend the language of rights to encompass, centrally, the most egalitarian of demands upon the economy.<sup>39</sup>

We will return to these latter points. Yet one would underestimate at one's peril the value of nurturing the seeds of a democratic culture *per se* in South Africa. For those seeds, apparent, from an early date, in the practices of many of the non-racial trade unions as well as elsewhere in the progressive movement, have been counterbalanced by other, more negative trends within that very movement (as within South African society more generally). These are trends at least as dangerous as any autocratic bent the ANC may manifest from time to time. For too often the ethos of struggle and of 'ungovernability' has combined with the brutal imperatives that play upon lives lived under apartheid to throw up countercultures of political intolerance. Particularly among the youth of the townships one can find the cruellest of practices engaged in against presumed enemies of progressive change. Moreover, the norms of genuinely democratic practice have too often been abused even in the infighting between fellow progressive organizations and political parties. In short, creation of an ethos respectful of 'civil society' and 'democratic rights' would be no small accomplishment in a new, post-apartheid South Africa—even in advance of their implicating a deeply democratic (read: socialist) questioning of the socioeconomic inequalities that haunt the country.

Since the bearers of such democratic purposes still circle most articulately and effectively around the ANC, it remains correct to see the ANC-centred movement (in effect, the erstwhile 'Mass Democratic Movement') as the core of resistance—in spite of whatever more questionable attributes may also mark it. It is self-evidently more positive than any new coalition of partners—centrist whites, black township

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<sup>39</sup> Albie Sachs, *Protecting Human Rights in a New South Africa*, Oxford 1990.

councillors and homeland notables (including Buthelezi)—that De Klerk seems, on occasion, to have in mind. And it is more positive than anything on offer from that alternative claimant to liberation movement status, the Pan-Africanist Congress, still without great popular support but waiting in the wings for the ANC to stumble: cultural-nationalist—its crypto-racism sometimes masquerading as a kind of leftism (around maximalist, but largely rhetorical, 'land claims', for example)—the PAC seems intent on becoming as scarred on home ground by opportunism and internecine struggle as it has been over the long years of exile. Meanwhile other claimants to attention (the left Black Consciousness position of AZAPO, the militant Trotskyism of the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action [WOSA]), which are much more admirable than the PAC, remain far from the mainstream of movement politics. As long as that mainstream has vitality enough to promise the bringing of significant transformation to South Africa these latter must remain relatively minor players.<sup>40</sup>

### Militancy and the Negotiating Process

We will return to an evaluation of the long-run nature of this promise. The more immediate question remains whether this 'ANC mainstream' has vitality enough even to deliver on negotiations. We have seen that unleashing into the negotiations process the energy of its mass base has proved difficult for it. And some of the major constituent parts of the movement the ANC ostensibly heads have also felt themselves disenfranchised by ANC tactics. Thus a COSATU conference in November 1990 invoked specifically the precedents of Zimbabwe and Namibia, where, it was argued, workers had been 'left out' of constitutional negotiations, and expressed concern about its own degree of access to the South African process.<sup>41</sup> In a similar vein, the ANC's closest ally, the SACP, felt compelled to editorialize (in its journal *Umsobonzi*) that 'if the broad popular masses become spectators in the negotiating process then our negotiating hand is drastically weakened... the revolutionary alliance has not found a formula for linking mass struggle with the main, potential cutting edge of transformation... the negotiating process.' Fortunately, the previously mentioned ANC Consultative Conference in December did provide some antidote to this, suggesting an ongoing demand for empowerment from the base that was of great potential significance.

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<sup>40</sup> For a detailed and instructive survey of progressive political organizations in South Africa, see the special issue of *WIR*, no. 72, January–February 1991, entitled 'A Year in the Life of the Left: The state of play since February 2 1990 focusing on the ANC, SACP, PAC, Azapo and Wosa'.

<sup>41</sup> Significantly, the conference stated the need both for a range of provisions that would guarantee popular checks on a future state and, 'since Cosatu is committed to changing our capitalist economy and building socialism, we need a clause in the constitution to help us fight for these objectives'; see Drew Forrest, 'A union call goes out: we want our seats' (Forrest's sub-heading: 'The unions were ignored in the Zimbabwe talks... and again in Namibia. It must not be allowed to happen here, insists Cosatu'), *The Weekly Mail*, 16–22 November 1990. At about the same time a senior ANC regional organizer, Andrew Mapheto, launched an incisive and widely cited critique (*WIR*, no. 68, 1990) of the ANC leadership for 'falling prey to de Klerk's sweet talk' and failing to reach 'people on the ground'.

In the immediate context of the conference this meant a very sharp critique from the base of the whole negotiations strategy and of the ANC's failure to facilitate popular self-defence in the townships. The refreshing irreverence of delegates clearly discomfited Mandela (whom polls were soon to show to be running behind the ANC in popularity), but the political vitality displayed had great resonance. It gave some promise, certainly, of a vibrant 'National Conference' scheduled to follow in July 1991, when fresh elections for office holders could be expected to alter the composition of the ANC leadership and bring to the fore a new generation of leaders, many with on-the-ground UDF and trade-union backgrounds. As we will see, this would prove, at least in part, to be the case. More immediately, the December meeting itself reinforced attempts to reorganize and ventilate the movement, while also giving fresh urgency to plans both to generate volunteer 'township defence forces' and to expand the range of 'mass action'.<sup>43</sup> The intention: to focus once more De Klerk's attention on the legitimate demands and real power of the popular movement.

Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the December conference, it was felt De Klerk might have become far more flexible, *Southscan* arguing (a bit prematurely, as things turned out) that 'the past weeks have seen a major shift in government thinking. The key impetus for this was the ANC's 16 December conference. Despite a year of talks with the ANC De Klerk and his Cabinet were entirely unprepared for both the militancy and the degree of influence exercised by rank-and-file delegates.'<sup>43</sup> Would fear of chaos and/or fear of further radicalization of popular-movement demands and strategies<sup>44</sup> finally convince De Klerk to accept the full deracializing logic of the most liberal of (pro-capitalist) positions? And would/could the ANC leadership be more assertive in pressing its demands upon him?

To some degree, in the first months of 1991, the ANC did become more militant. An ultimatum to De Klerk—now no longer presented as 'a man of integrity' by Mandela—that it would break off negotiations and resume armed struggle unless he ceased foot-dragging on the question of prisoners and exiles brought some accelerated movement from the state president on this issue. A related April ultimatum calling for more effective government action to curb violence (and including a demand for dismissal of Defence Minister Malan and Law and Order Minister Adriaan Vlok) stirred things up some more; 'ANC's Shock Therapy', *Front File* called it.<sup>45</sup> Predictably, a move by

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<sup>43</sup> See, in this connection, the article by Ronnie Kasrils and Mandla Khuzwayo, ('two senior cadres in residual ANC underground structures', as they are described), 'Voices from the underground: Mass struggle is the key', *WIF*, no. 72, January–February 1991; the same issue of *WIF* features instructive articles by Jenny Cargill on the state of the ANC after the December conference ('Marrying mass action and creative leadership') and by David Niddrie ('Apartheid's not dead, it just smells funny')

<sup>44</sup> *Southscan*, 25 January 1991.

<sup>45</sup> *Southscan* ('De Klerk, anticipating danger, prepares for a rush to reform', *ibid.*) suggests an emerging desire on De Klerk's part now to deal with the existing, reasonably pliable ANC negotiations team while this was still possible: 'Crucial to all these options is rapid progress towards the point at which these details are hammered out, and the need to pre-empt the second articulation, in June, of rank and file ANC sentiment' (emphasis added)

<sup>46</sup> *Front File*, April 1991.

an (understandably sceptical) ANC to offer some kind of olive branch to Buthelezi was unsuccessful. More important has been its attempt to strengthen its bargaining position by reaching out to other forces of opposition, notably the PAC and AZAPO, in proposing a broad front around the minimum condition of insistence upon election of a constituent assembly has been rather more promising.

In May it was still not clear that any of this was working, De Klerk continuing to drag his feet (even attempting at one point to invoke legalistic quibbles to deny the ANC the right to mobilize mass action) and the ANC not yet able to wield its continuing majority support—so the polls say—with full effect. One suspects 'negotiations' over a new constitution will come eventually, but with their form and content deeply scarred by what is now transpiring. Thus some critics began to fear that the ANC negotiating team might yet, in desperate response to continuing government intransigence, make significant concessions on questions of process (including qualifying its demands for an interim government and a constituent assembly and accepting something closer to De Klerk's preferred non-elected, multi-party format). In the event, delegates to the ANC's July conference (discussed in more detail below) were militantly to insist that no significant concessions along these lines be made. But—Catch 22—would this, in turn, merely further widen the chasm between the ANC and the white government? Already, in May, when the ANC—well in advance of its July congress—actually did break off negotiations (however temporarily) and begin to take to the streets again, it was not clear whether the upshot would be to focus, finally, De Klerk's attention on the urgency of the moment or merely to feed further a downward spiral towards 'barbarism'.

For the moment, certainly, the torment of the townships continues.<sup>46</sup> And yet the fallout from 'Inkathagate'—putting the government on the defensive, gravely damaging Buthelezi, and vindicating the allegations of the ANC before a wider audience—must also have an effect. In its wake, the ANC would now seem to be in a far stronger position to press its demands (especially those linked to the issues of an interim government and constituent assembly) upon a discredited government. The movement has thus been given the opportunity to regain the initiative in South Africa. Of course, this very circumstance also puts the ANC to a new test: it further calls into question any 'elite-pacting' strategy towards which the ANC leadership may have been tempted, while simultaneously challenging the movement to demonstrate its popularly based bona fides ever more tellingly. Revived international outrage at De Klerk's machinations may play some role in easing the transition in South Africa. Much more depends on the ability of the ANC now to so mobilize and give focus to mass political activity inside South Africa as to force De Klerk—or any successor to him—to move further.

### III Reformism, Revolution, Structural Reform

At present all long-term bets are off pending the outcome of the

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<sup>46</sup> Another cruel twist, in the present uncertain moment even some of the erstwhile 'progressive youth' turn 'commotisi' (this latter being an ironic amalgam, in the popular argot, of the word 'comrade' and the word for criminal).

negotiations moment. Thus, even some who have resisted most vigorously the hoary ANC argument for 'a two-stage revolution' (political democracy/national liberation first, socioeconomic transformation second) seem inclined, momentarily, to bracket off tough questions about democratizing the economy in order to support the ANC successfully through such negotiations.<sup>47</sup> Their premiss: with a Lebanonization of South Africa the minimally ordered terrain on which a struggle for socialism might actually be mounted would disappear. Yet—the paradox created by such simultaneity was noted at the outset of this article—the fact remains that *South Africans are already living the post-apartheid moment*.

This is true, self-evidently, of such constitutional negotiations as may now emerge: any rights, vetoes, privileges, inscribed into the constitution will shape the range of policy-making possibilities in the next round in South Africa. But—to follow through on a crucial issue anticipated earlier—the parameters of such possibilities will be set, in even more crucial ways, by subtler processes. Indeed, centres of established socioeconomic power are already working overtime to put their own stamp on the next round. If the popular movement has such difficulties in garnering, from the existing state, a democratic outcome in the political sphere, how likely is it to face down the forces of capital, together with such remnants of that state as survive, in winning a democratic-cum-socialist outcome in the socioeconomic sphere? More specifically, how likely is *an ANC-centred movement* to deliver such an outcome; how likely is it to be, in the terms developed in our introduction, the key 'bearer' of any 'project of structural reform' that may emerge.

### A Neo-Liberal Agenda

But first: how do the holders of power seek to monopolize the agenda regarding post-apartheid South Africa? As we have seen, the diverse pressures that weigh upon him have forced from De Klerk a dangerously wilful approach to constitution-making. In many ways, his approach to the *following* round has been more straightforward, and on this front he has also been much more of a 'team player' alongside the representatives of the business community. Not surprisingly, private enterprise is the name of the game—accompanied by an important ideological talisman, the much repeated phrase, 'growth with redistribution'. As noted earlier, few in circles of political/economic power in South Africa would now speak out against some redressing of the deep-seated socioeconomic inequalities (socioeconomic inequalities that overlap racial inequalities, needless to say) existing in South Africa. However, the goal of capital is to define these inequalities as a welfare problem (redistribution), rather than a production problem. Growth must be left to the marketplace, and to the owners of the means of production.

Not that, even then, the latter are entirely certain of what a successful growth path might look like. The economic roots of South Africa's crisis run very deep indeed, with some division within government/ business circles about the relative merits of an 'inward

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<sup>47</sup> O'Meara/Saul, 'The High Costs of Scalemate'.



industrialization' as against an 'export-oriented' growth strategy. Gelb argues that the latter emphasis is carrying the day, a ruling-class strategy emerging that 'focuses on restructuring and regenerating the manufacturing sector in particular by using "neo-liberal" (market-based) policies to alter cost structures and restore profitability, and to expand markets for manufactures, especially through exports. The emphasis is on beneficiation of minerals and other commodities currently exported in a semi-processed form, together with other intermediate manufactures.'<sup>48</sup> We will return to a discussion of the merits of any such choice. What bears emphasizing here is that, in ruling circles, the 'choice' of strategy is (quite literally) to be defined as being capital's business.

In this 'neo-liberal' scenario the state will continue to bail out of the production sphere as rapidly as possible (via privatization), while further freeing the marketplace of unwelcome intrusions (the repeal of the racially defined Land Act is a case in point, giving the appearance of a progressive reform without involving any real attempt more actively to redress historical injustices in that sphere). Some efforts both to free space for and to help finance African entrepreneurs are afoot, while various sectorally defined 'negotiations frameworks' (additional to the national-political one) are also being elaborated with an eye to coopting other key actors. Thus both state and capital must hope that the link forged between the employer body, the South African Consultative Committee on Labour Affairs (SACCOLA), and the trade unions (COSATU and its fellow union NACTU) in working out a joint position on amendments to the proposed Labour Relations Act and the subsequent incorporation of COSATU into the tripartite National Manpower Council (NMC) signal the possible corraling of the trade unions within a controllable format of benign corporatism.

And then there is 'redistribution' itself. Allocations for black health and education have indeed risen in recent budgets and much has also been made of the state-funded Independent Development Trust (the 'Steyn Fund'). Yet the latter—in essence a public complement to private-sector efforts (especially those of the Urban Foundation) to facilitate private home ownership—seems primarily designed to ease the upward mobility of a better-off stratum of black South Africans rather than to effect any more profound restructuring; it thus lends further credence to Gelb's conclusion that the emergent neo-liberal project will merely 'reinforce and extend a dualistic structure of society', albeit with some greater measure of deracialization of that structure. Moreover, the latest budget (20 March 1991) shows how limited redistributive efforts within the current structure really are. Defence expenditure remains by far the largest item, while company taxes have been lowered in favour of a new, broad-gauged VAT (thereby 'shifting', in COSATU's telling phrase, 'the tax burden from big business on to the shoulder of workers and ordinary people').

Such 'redistribution' is pretty small beer, then. Most in the ANC are well aware of this—and of the related fact that an economy left largely to its own devices will merely reproduce, 'spontaneously', a great deal

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<sup>48</sup> Stephen Gelb, 'South Africa's Economic Crisis: An Overview', draft introduction to Stephen Gelb, ed., *South Africa's Economic Crisis*, Johannesburg, forthcoming.

of racial inequality. Yet many feel hemmed in by the power of capital, both global and local. As business now ceaselessly informs South Africans, capital is immensely mobile—the corporation Anglo-American is already active in moving some of its stake ‘offshore’ for example—as are many of the whites whose skills help steer the system. Moreover, denizens of the World Bank and IMF are on the scene, actively reminding everyone concerned (including, quite directly, the ANC) both of the vulnerability of the South African economy in international financial circles and of the need for ‘sound’ policies.<sup>49</sup> Look what happened when Mozambique tried to move towards socialism too quickly and too heedlessly: the socialist effort there was both ‘premature and wrong’, says Joe Slovo of the ANC/SACP. True, in Zimbabwe, where the leadership claimed to have profited from Mozambique’s mistakes, things merely went too slowly to permit any very significant post-liberation alteration of the structure of colonial capitalism. But can we really afford to rock the boat? some nationalists ask. Shouldn’t circumspection be the order of the day?

South Africa is different from Zimbabwe, of course, and even more so from Mozambique; there is a developed working class and many other articulate bearers of grievances that spring from extreme socio-economic inequalities. Yet, as is well known, the ANC does not speak only for such voices. It is a pan-class body, many of whose leaders pride themselves not only on being open to dialogue with big business but also on welcoming aboard its project aspirant black entrepreneurs. Nor can there be any doubt that the narrowly nationalist and petty-bourgeois instincts of many of the ANC’s own long-serving cadres will now be reinforced by the rush to join the organization of others with similar instincts and aspirations. True, Mandela made a firm bow in the direction of the ANC’s left-of-centre vocation immediately upon his release from prison, his unrepentant insistence upon the priority of ‘nationalization’ striking a particularly blunt note in those early days. But this was soon to be substantially qualified, not least by Mandela himself (‘I must stress that the entire economy, in so far as we are concerned will remain intact [and] will continue to be based on free enterprise’<sup>50</sup>)—even if resistance to any further privatization has remained a prominent feature of ANC pronouncements. In part, perhaps, this can be interpreted as a short-term tactical withdrawal from more advanced positions. But it is easy to believe that there are prominent actors within the ANC prepared to buy the most modest version of the ‘growth with redistribution’ line.

### Rethinking the Mixed Economy

But if this is one pull upon the ANC, it must be acknowledged that

<sup>49</sup> On the sophistication of this World Bank/IMF softening-up process, and on some of the likely terms of their long-run influence, see Patrick Bond, ‘Closing In: The World Bank and the IMF in South Africa’, *SAR*, vol. 7, no. 1, July 1991.

<sup>50</sup> As quoted in the *International Herald Tribune* (‘Mandela Outlines Policy. Private Enterprise to be Foundation’, 27 February 1990), where, however, Mandela is also said to have reaffirmed the ANC’s commitment to ‘nationalizing mines and banks’. Elsewhere Mandela has been quoted as insisting the ANC is not ‘anti-capitalist’, and as rejecting ‘the commonly held belief that the Freedom Charter is fundamentally socialist’ (*Weekly Mail*, 27 April 1990).

there are plenty of counter-pulls and a diversity of energies within the organization; if nothing else the Congress tradition is a protean one. For the ANC is articulating, even now, other futures than those just mentioned. True, the main emphasis found on the left of the ANC-centred movement regarding such questions—an emphasis premised on the centrality, for the foreseeable future, of a 'mixed economy'—will make many uneasy. Does this emphasis merely spring, as, at best, a vaguely 'reformist' perspective, from a left practice that has opportunistically tailed 'nationalist-populism' all these years and that now shows its true social-democratic colours? Some such judgement is the obvious subtext of Alex Callinicos's sardonic dismissal of an earlier comment by Joe Slovo (one that heralded, it might be argued, the now predominant left perspective on socialist transition in South Africa): 'It is only the indigenous representative of the disastrous Pol Pot philosophy who can project a pole-vault into socialism and communism the day after the overthrow of white rule.'<sup>22</sup>

And there *are* grounds for suspicion of such a sentiment coming from such a source: historically the ANC/SACP's two-stage theory has, at its most crass, systematically understated the extent to which active and self-conscious working-class pressure upon capital would need to be a necessary complement to 'popular-class' pressure upon the racist state in wringing significant concessions from the ruling bloc. And a further smothering of militancy and class struggle—in the name of 'economic common sense' and the safeguarding of 'national priorities' for example—could very well spring from such quarters in the next round. Yet this is not inevitable; as I have argued previously in these pages there has, all along, been more vitality to left initiatives within the ANC-centred movement than many ANC/SACP theoretical formulations have helped to illuminate.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, a reading of the comparative experience of prior socialist experiments (within the region and beyond) and the hard facts of the South African situation (as defined both domestically and with reference to the international economy) suggest the warnings of Slovo and others on the need for extreme subtlety in seeking to democratize the South African economy to be fundamentally correct. It is fortunate, then, that somewhere between the potent pull of 'reformism' and the abstract irrelevance of calls for 'revolution' there are emerging in South Africa elements of a project of 'structural reform' that might yet prove appropriate to the exigencies of the post-apartheid moment.

We return by this route to the 'mixed economy'. As the ANC-linked British economist Lawrence Harris has put the point, 'a mixed economy is not necessarily socialist, but may have either a socialist or a capitalist orientation depending on the context and how it is implemented.'<sup>24</sup> And indeed, within the ANC, there are signs that the

<sup>22</sup> Callinicos quotes Slovo, circa 1986, in his 'Can South Africa be Reformed?' p. 113, and interprets this quotation as manifesting the basest kind of 'Gorbachevism'.

<sup>23</sup> Saul, 'South Africa: The Question of Strategy'.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence Harris, 'Building the Mixed Economy', paper presented to the ANC's Department of Economics and Planning workshop, Harare, April–May 1990, p. 10; see also Harris's earlier paper, 'The Mixed Economy of a Democratic South Africa', mimeograph, June 1989.

concept is beginning to be used in a promisingly expansive sense, even if this pre-planning process is still not very far advanced: 'the resources which have to be generated to correct the inherited imbalances and deprivations of the majority demand, in the first place, a necessary degree of state control (involving selective forms of ownership and participation) over strategic sectors of the economy. In the second place, the necessary coexistence of a private and social sector—the balance between the "market" and the "plan"—must accord pride of place to the latter.'<sup>24</sup>

Like Harris, other ANC economists—Max Sisulu, Tito Mboweni and Ketso Gordhan<sup>25</sup>—have begun to draft plans stressing the extent to which more aggressive and equitable taxation policies and measures like 'prescribed asset requirements' and other controls over the financial system can be used to mobilize and steer surpluses. Without abandoning it altogether as a tactic, they seek to rethink the rhetoric of 'nationalization' and conceive additional possible means of controlling capital: 'we could, for example, legislate that representatives of the community and workers be on the boards of all companies, [although] this needs to be debated so that we can find other forms of ownership that lie between state and totally privately owned enterprises.' And they stress the possibility of breaking up huge (and internally self-financing) conglomerates, the better both 'to realize economies of scale' and to make their decisions more subject to influence by state financial and other levers. Meanwhile, a discussion paper from the ANC Land Commission discusses a range of possible modes of intervention in the rural economy that goes far beyond the present government's market-limited reform of the land system. In short, on this and other fronts, attempts to 'think the unthinkable' are clearly underway.

This is especially evident when these macroeconomic considerations are given the spin provided by the second conceptual point of reference (in addition to 'the mixed economy') currently in extensive circulation on the South African Left: 'growth *through* redistribution'. As Manfred Bienefeld has recently observed, this catchphrase, 'growth with redistribution', may be misleading. For the most articulate proponents of this perspective are not merely advocating a redistribution of income to the less well off in order to create a different (more 'basic needs' driven) pattern of demand for capitalists to respond to. Well beyond this threshold, and against the welfarist free-marketeers of the 'growth with redistribution' school, they too have begun to advocate a mode of aggressive intervention in the production process that would actually guide/force the private sector into a new pattern of investment and production. In doing so, they link a concern to redress socioeconomic inequalities to the dour fact that South African capitalism does not work very well even in its own terms, that it has not found, in Gelb's formulation cited earlier, a post-Fordist growth path that would permit significant accumulation to recommence. Bienefeld

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<sup>24</sup> Joe Slovo, 'Nudging the balance from "free" to "plan"', *The Weekly Mail*, 30 March–4 April 1990.

<sup>25</sup> See the article entitled 'Nationalisation', *New Nation*, 8–14 March 1991.

suggests the phrase 'growth through direction of production' as more descriptive of the kind of activist agenda that Gelb and others advocate in order to stimulate growth on new terms.

### COSATU and Working-Class Empowerment

Such preoccupations were at their most visible at an important ANC-COSATU meeting held to discuss economic futures in Harare in mid 1990.<sup>36</sup> In summarizing the thrust of that meeting's formal 'recommendations', Gelb (until recently coordinator of the COSATU-linked 'Economic Trends Group') contrasted the establishment view, 'trapped within a static framework offering only a choice of the appropriate point in a trade-off between growth and redistribution', with the ANC/COSATU view that 'is both oriented towards dynamic development and greater equality'. In spelling out this latter position, Gelb agrees that the core issue is not so much the redistribution of consumption as 'the redistribution of investment': 'On the one hand, the level of investment in productive activity would have to be substantially increased, especially in drawing funds out of the financial markets. At the same time, the emphasis in the composition of productive investment would need to be shifted away from the current situation towards those industries and sectors targeted for accumulation as part of the overall accumulation strategy.' While within this model state intervention would be selective, where undertaken it would have to be 'pervasive, that is, far-reaching in shaping the activities of economic agents, as opposed to the neo-liberal reliance on autonomous responses'. The projected result: an investment pattern tilted towards such new motors of growth as labour-intensive/employment-producing light industries, township housing, services and infrastructure.

There is much more to be done here of course: many details remain hazy; debate continues regarding the role of the 'informal sector' or of an exports strategy or of other crucial considerations within such a model; an adequate picture of the limitations likely to be imposed upon South Africa by the workings of the international economy is very far from having been elaborated. What bears affirming, however, is that some of the premisses of an approach that slowly and 'realistically', *but surely and self-consciously*, tilts the balance towards an imposition of collective social purpose upon the economy are beginning to take shape within the popular movement in South Africa. Equally important is a pervasive sense that the essential guarantor must be a populace which is increasingly empowering itself to sustain the momentum of such a process. In this regard it is important to note, at Harare and elsewhere, the extent to which the 'growth through direction of production' perspective has sprung from the trade-union movement—in interaction with, but not in subordination to, the ANC. In fact, much the strongest statements about the necessary centrality of socialist preoccupations in a post-apartheid South Africa have continued to come in recent years from the trade unions:

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Gelb, 'Democratising Economic Growth: Alternative Growth models for the Future', *Transformation*, 12, 1990. See also 'The Economy Beyond Apartheid: Recommendations on post-apartheid economic policy', *New Nation*, 15–21 June 1991, being the summary document produced by the ANCCOSATU consultation in Harare.

'socialism remains the economic order representing freedom for workers' while 'nationalization remains high on the COSATU agenda', asserts that union's vice president Chris Dlamini.<sup>57</sup> And NUMSA's Bernie Faneroff warns against 'economism—a preoccupation with wages rather than the economic system as a whole' while urging his union 'to lay foundations for the revamping of the economy on socialist lines'.<sup>58</sup>

This is not to suggest that, even within COSATU, there is unanimity about how working-class advance might best be achieved; some measure of the 'workerist'-versus-'populist' division over the terms of engagement with the broader popular movement remains.<sup>59</sup> At the 'workerist' end of the spectrum cluster both those with narrowly corporatist and those with more broadly leftist/Trotskyist suspicions of the ANC, while at the populist end are some who might still prefer merely to tail the political movement. On this spectrum, however, it is the centre position that seems more potent—and more promising. For example, this centre anchors a desire, now even more widely shared than in the recent past, for a healthy degree of trade-union autonomy from even the most sympathetic of political parties—with most unions also pressing the campaign to adopt a 'Workers' Charter', touching on crucial working-class interests, to which any post-apartheid government could be held to account. It is in some such spirit that this grouping continues to acknowledge the ANC's political centrality: 'We need to be independent but we also need to be interdependent', says COSATU's Sydney Mafumedi.<sup>60</sup> It is also in this spirit that it continues to press its left concerns upon the ANC: in the words of NUMSA's Alec Erwin, 'for all its weaknesses the ANC has the most developed economic policy of all parties.'

Note, moreover, the way in which the option for sustaining such a 'revolutionary alliance' in the post-apartheid period is further conceptualized. For the NUMSA radicals, for example, the struggle for a democratic economy does require a strong state able to plan and intervene decisively. At the same time, they emphasize, such a struggle can never be resolved merely by some one-off 'seizure of power'. Rather it will have to be realized as the expression of a process of unfolding empowerment emanating from the base. As Erwin himself put the point in reflecting on the Harare Recommendations, '[these] recommendations are no blueprint for socialism. They constitute a framework for reconstruction and transition. They will be a transition to socialism if the working class can achieve this by its own organisational strength.' He continued, 'Do organized workers develop programmatic positions on [questions of the role of the state, planning

<sup>57</sup> Even more concrete is the vigorous discussion taking place within the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) regarding the possible wisdom of nationalization measures to shore up an increasingly vulnerable South African mining industry.

<sup>58</sup> *Southstar*, 16 February 1990.

<sup>59</sup> See Drew Forrest, 'Rival currents at work in Cosatu', *Weekly Mail*, 11 April 1991; with many union leaders very visible within the ANC and/or SACP, one focus of recent sharp debate has been the acceptability of union leaders wearing 'two hats' (three hats?) in this way.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in *Southstar*, 10 May 1991.

and mass organisations], or do they stand back waiting for state power to move them to socialism?' The choice, he asserts, depends on one's view about the nature of the struggle for socialism: 'Within COSATU there has always been a majority viewpoint that believes that contesting issues in the present and doing it in a way that builds worker power and democratic processes within worker organisation is to carry the struggle for socialism forward and not to abandon it.'<sup>61</sup>

How, in short, is content to be given to a sentiment most clearly expressed in a recent COSATU document, one prepared for the union's first economic policy conference (May 1991): 'we can no longer sit back and watch the capitalists and the state make a mess of the economy. Nor can we simply fight for political change and hope that when it comes our economic problems will be solved.'<sup>62</sup> One answer, currently much canvassed within COSATU, is to reach what is termed a 'reconstruction accord' with the ANC. Such an accord would certainly enhance the likelihood of tying the ANC to COSATU's own 'perspectives on how to achieve economic growth and redistribution in a democratic South Africa'<sup>63</sup>—and enhance, too, the likelihood of a future ANC government imposing such perspectives, from above, on capital. Moreover, the very process of generating the terms of such an accord would also help guide COSATU members to bring pressure to bear on capital *from below*—by introducing issues crucially related to economic reconstruction into their various arenas of collective bargaining, at national, industry-wide, and company/plant levels.

Take, for example, the arena of national bargaining. It is just such a perspective that frames COSATU's own view of its controversial interface—referred to earlier—with SACCOLA and with the state, most recently through tripartite participation on the National Manpower Commission.<sup>64</sup> Can such sectoral 'negotiations'—an instrument of potential cooptation when conceived by South African business (and by

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<sup>61</sup> Alec Erwin, 'Comment' (on the Harare 'Recommendations on Post-Apartheid Economic Policy'), *Transformation*, 12, 1990. On this point, see also the symptomatic review ('Rethinking Socialism', *South African Labour Bulletin* (SALB), vol. 15, no. 7, April 1991) by long-time observer of the South African labour scene, Eddie Webster, of a recent book by John Mathews, entitled *Age of Democracy: The Politics of Post-Fordism*, Melbourne 1989. Webster cites Mathews's concept of 'associative democracy' ('the emphasis is on *associations* of workers and citizens as the agents of democratisation', with 'trade unions [to be] involved in transforming the economy from within'), while precisising approvingly Mathews's notion that 'the state must be seen as the institution which supports and co-ordinates the process of change, rather than the institution which 'delivers' social transformation' (p. 82).

<sup>62</sup> The same document (quoted in 'Unions urge national reconstruction plan in face of recession', *Southstar*, 24 May 1991) calls for a policy and strategy 'to change the economic situation, stop retrenchments, create jobs and begin the struggle for socialism'.

<sup>63</sup> See SALB, vol. 15, no. 6, March 1991, special issue entitled 'From Resistance to reconstruction: the role of trade unions in the new South Africa', and, in particular, the article by Karl van Holdt, 'Towards transforming SA industry: a "reconstruction accord" between unions and the ANC'.

<sup>64</sup> Alex Callinicos, for one, appears scandalized by such an approach; in his 'Can South Africa be Reformed?' he scorns the very first step in this process, the initial—and, when backed judiciously by the invocation of mass action, ultimately successful—negotiations with SACCOLA, as capitulation to the (to him highly suspect) overall negotiations tactic of the MDM and as virtual abandonment of class struggle.

the World Bank/IMF South Africa team) in terms of their favoured outcome, a new 'social contract'—be turned inside out and take the imprint, instead, of ever-expanding working-class empowerment? There is an echo here of the famous 'registration debate' of the late 1970s: should unions, it was then asked, refuse to 'legalize' themselves within the framework of the state's new industrial-relations legislation (thereby avoiding the attendant risk of cooptation and/or government control) or instead 'register' and use the newly claimed legal terrain as room for manoeuvre to advance working-class interests ever more assertively?

The latter route was chosen, with benefits now seen to have outweighed any costs incurred, and much the same calculation is being made in the present situation. Already COSATU is pushing the boundaries of the NMC, insisting that 'it needs to be a body that helps restructure the economy so that it serves the needs of all the people.' It has been argued along similar lines that, indeed, advances might be made here on various 'issues arising out of a "reconstruction accord" such as investment priorities for public and private-sector investment; investment codes for foreign investment; the role of investment funds in investment; labour-market issues such as a framework for training, minimum wages, etc.; international trade controls and incentives; and worker rights.'<sup>65</sup> Moreover, in its first major confrontation within the NMC framework COSATU pugnaciously forced the government to back down on its attempted exclusion of farmworkers from the Basic Conditions of Employment Act—and it now seeks to do the same for domestic workers.

In this view, the NMC is to be considered as being, in effect, one more front for institutionalizing a situation of 'dual power', with cooptation a risk but the ongoing struggle between classes the presumptive reality, both now and in the future. There are other examples of such trends. Thus, the long-time movement-related organization, the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), has begun to take a role alongside the government in arbitrating curriculum development—and it will no doubt play an even more active role in future in seeking to transform South Africa's grotesquely misshapen educational system. Various civic associations—increasingly reasserting their autonomous existence, as we have seen—are also locked in negotiations with established (white) urban authorities in pursuit of solutions to the problems of township life that reflect a more inclusive and equitable form of urban planning. How should we assess such manifestations of popular struggle—within and without the ANC, within and without state-structured processes? And what of the possible involvement of less readily heard-from constituencies—squatters in all those urban slums that are expanding explosively outside the boundaries of the formal townships, rural dwellers, farmworkers and smallholders alike, in their vast numbers—that have been much slower to develop organizational forms of self-expression?<sup>66</sup> In so many impressive ways, *empowerment* is the language of present-day South Africa; we

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<sup>65</sup> Karl van Hekdt, p. 23.

<sup>66</sup> Facilitating the expression of such groups will seem all the more important if it is borne in mind that organized workers still comprise a relatively small percentage of adult South Africans. Moreover, as some trade-union leaders are themselves concerned



scarcely need reminding, simultaneously, that the fight to realize it, both within and without the constitutional negotiations process, has only just begun.

### The Struggle for Women's Rights

Much the same things could be said of the struggle for post-apartheid advance on the gender front, although here, too, some important advances are already being made. It is true, historically speaking, that the ANC Women's League can easily be accused of having too readily subordinated the fight for women's rights *per se* to the presumed imperatives of the nationalist struggle. More recently, however, women within the ANC itself have begun to challenge such priorities and have pressed for far more advanced positions.<sup>67</sup> One result has been the release of a far-reaching statement on the 'Emancipation of Women in South Africa' by the ANC's National Executive Committee (May 1990): 'The experience of other societies has shown that the emancipation of women is not a by-product of a struggle for democracy. It has to be addressed in its own right within our organization, the mass democratic movement and in society as a whole... The prevalence of patriarchal attitudes in South African society permeates our own organizations, especially at decision-making levels, and the lack of a strong mass women's organization has been to the detriment of our struggle.' However, there is also awareness amongst activist women that much more needs to be done to ensure that this kind of sensibility determines the day-to-day practices of the movement.<sup>68</sup> Nor, they argue, has the ANC yet found the most effective voice in which to speak to South African women more generally (with even Inkatha appearing sometimes to have more success in this regard, albeit from a quite reactionary point of approach).

The views of ANC women are not themselves uniform, however, the recently elected president of the organization, Gertrude Shope, being considered quite conservative on many relevant issues, for example. Nonetheless, a tough fight around gender seems likely to continue to spark the organization. Thus, the Women's League's recent Kimberley national conference demanded 'that at least 30 per cent of all positions in ANC structures and departments be held by women—and

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<sup>66</sup> (*cont.*)

to observe, the strategic locations of many such workers within the economy, as well as the very fact of their relatively high level of organization (and attendant bargaining muscle), could encourage their taking on some of the characteristics of a 'labour aristocracy'. It also bears noting, however, that much of the discussion within the unions regarding a prospective 'reconstruction accord' does suggest that both civics and rural organizations must also be parties to it.

<sup>67</sup> On these issues see Linzi Manicom, 'Engendering the New South Africa: Women and the ANC', *SAR*, vol. 6, no. 4, March 1991, which also cites the ANC's 'Emancipation of Women' statement quoted below.

<sup>68</sup> For example, a sharp and very concrete critique, written from a gender-sensitive perspective, of even the most progressive ANC economic advance planning exercises can be found in the paper 'Gender and Economic Policy in a Democratic South Africa', Development and Practice Research Group, Working Paper No. 21, Faculty of Technology, Open University, 1991, written, with Maureen Mackintosh and Doreen Massey, by leading ANC cadre Frene Ginwala.

that women must participate in the negotiating teams and help to draw up the new constitution.<sup>69</sup> Sexual harassment, gender-biased education, and the plight of domestic workers were amongst the numerous other issues that surfaced at the conference. Meanwhile, some also question how exclusively the struggle for women's rights should be confined to the ANC. Not that such assertions are absent in other arenas—the trade unions being a case in point. But—parallel-ing the debates of union and civics' activists in this respect—the question arises whether organizing efforts by women outside the realm of direct political party linkage is not also necessary. And some steps towards a new, more inclusive 'National Alliance' of women beyond the ANC Women's League have, indeed, been taken.

That said, the struggle for women's rights does seem to find much of its strongest resonance, at least for the moment, inside the ANC. As noted, other struggles for progressive outcomes (those of the unions and civics, in particular) take place more in that grey area where the most progressive expressions of 'civil society' on the one hand, and the political movement-cum-party on the other, overlap. It is here that a positive and progressive dialectic between the two terms of this equation could be joined: a progressive civil society to drive the party (the ANC?) forward; a responsive party to give focus and effect to the most positive urgings of that civil society—while also reminding the latter of the need to take some responsibility for working out the difficult trade-offs between competing demands. Of course, such a dialectic cannot—must not—be frozen institutionally; the tension between its two terms must *constantly remain in the process of being struggled over and resolved politically* if progressive outcomes are to emerge. Nonetheless, positively joined 'around an ever-deepening programme of structural reform it is just such a dialectical process that could, slowly but surely, deliver a popular empowerment of truly hegemonic proportions.<sup>70</sup>

### The SACP and the Question of Vanguardism

Such a model will not be a welcome one to many 'vanguard party' purists: it invokes a kind of 'left pluralism' that is just too fluid, too uncontrolled, *too risky*.<sup>71</sup> And some of the dangers such vanguardists see are real enough: for example, does the model not understate the difficulty of sustaining a political centre sufficiently strong to meet the kind of brutal challenges from class enemies and imperialist centres

<sup>69</sup> *Southbuck*, 3 May 1991.

<sup>70</sup> If only momentarily: the struggle to sustain such empowerment would not end, this fact defining a state of perpetual tension—if not 'perpetual opposition'—between the state and the popular forces (including workers and their trade unions). For a contrasting perspective, one more inclined to envision the ultimate disappearance of such tensions within the orbit of a workers' state, see the article by SACP activist, Jeremy Cronin, entitled, sardonically, 'Preparing ourselves for permanent opposition', *SALS* April 1991.

<sup>71</sup> Recall Lenin's statement (in ' "Left-Wing" Communism—An Infantile Disorder') that 'History as a whole, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more multiform, more lively and ingenious than is imagined by even the best parties, the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes.' What might have happened had Lenin himself made rather more of a virtue of this reality?

that any cumulatively successful left-hegemonic project is likely to encounter?<sup>72</sup> Yet its very openness to uncertainty is, in other ways, the great strength of a political perspective so defined. Moreover, as one of the alternative logics of development that are actually competing against one another within the ANC-centred movement it is both *important* (as a logic of development that remains pregnant with positive possibilities) and *potent* (it is, as we have seen, a logic that the undertakings of some of the most relevant actors in South Africa serve to advance).

There is even the distinct possibility that it is eminently *advisable*, not as some second-best route to transformation (in the absence of 'revolution'), but as much the most effective way forward. Recall Lenin's statement (in 'On Cooperation') about the difficulties of 'implanting socialism in an insufficiently cultured country', and the consequent need for 'educational work', for a 'cultural revolution'. Compare, in this respect, South Africa's black population, so long the victims of Bantu education and neglect. 'Empowerment' is not only about developing the political will to confront centres of exploitative power (a will that is not in short supply in much of South Africa), but also about manifesting the technical capability to turn newly won power into effective policy; and this will present a continuing challenge to South Africa's popular movement. Yet the fact that a populace is not deemed to be prepared for power 'culturally' (even in the strict sense used by Lenin) can become an excuse for the kind of pseudo-benevolent authoritarianism the vanguard model has so often given rise to in this century. Conceiving, instead, of a cumulative process of structural reform and an ongoing situation of dual power as aspects of a necessary *learning experience* seems one other crucial dimension of the democratizing sensibility that marks the 'post-apartheid' thinking of the best of South African socialists.

That said, the fact that the ANC is *not*, either in reality or in terms of this model, a vanguard party does give rise to concern, and not merely in Trotskyist circles. Indeed, within the Congress Alliance itself, the matter has come front and centre, debate turning around the role to be played, now and in the future, by the South African Communist Party. The SACP, so long a crucial ally of the ANC (and vitally important to keeping some kind of socialist discourse alive in that organization, albeit of a decidedly Stalinist provenance), has been going through a rebirth, and a rethink, of its own. A widely circulated pamphlet by Party secretary-general Joe Slovo entitled 'Has Socialism Failed?' has been particularly important in this regard.<sup>73</sup> Sharply critical of Eastern European practice, the pamphlet also sounds an unorthodox note on such questions as the need for organizational autonomy of the popular movement: thus 'instead of being guided by the interests and aspirations of their constituencies', the unions, as well as women's and youth organizations, became in Communist practice mere 'support

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<sup>72</sup> Then again, a progressive political centre without a suitably self-empowering base would be unlikely to sustain itself either—something already learned the hard way in the southern African region, in Mozambique for example.

<sup>73</sup> Joe Slovo, *Has Socialism Failed?*, London 1990.

bases for the ongoing dictates of the state and party apparatus'. Does Slovo's pamphlet signal an actual and not merely tactical recasting of first principles on the part of old-line SACP cadres?

There is sharp debate on this question and Slovo's essay has been sharply criticized from the left—notably, from within the ANC itself, by senior politician Pallo Jordan—for not having come quite clean on the extent of the Stalinist rot either in the Soviet Union or in the SACP's own practices.<sup>74</sup> But the party does have a strong street-level credibility, springing from the fact that it potently combines both impeccable (and popular) ANC credentials and a distinctly left aura of its own. Rather surprisingly, too, it is attracting to its ranks some of the cream of the democratically minded left leadership of COSATU. Accepting the hegemony of the ANC-centred movement but dubious as to the extent of the ANC's own left provenance, such trade-union cadres argue the need for having, beyond the trade unions, the presence of some kind of workers' party within the broad popular movement. Not that such elements are naive about the weaknesses, for such purposes, of the SACP itself.<sup>75</sup> They realize they will have to struggle hard to overcome the dead weight of the party's past. And, of course, 'if we're purged, we'll leave', as one such union activist ironically underscored the ambiguities of the exercise in recent discussion.

Meanwhile, the SACP itself is actively reaching out to such cadres: as leading party figure Raymond Mhlaba recently put it, 'The SACP and COSATU need to be as close together as possible. The ANC, on the other hand, is a mixed bag where you've got capitalists as well as workers and peasants. Now when we say we want to set up a socialist republic, the capitalists in the ANC will not agree, but the Communist Party and COSATU will be very good partners.'<sup>76</sup> Needless to say, there are a host of unanswered questions here. It seems unlikely that the party would ever merely abandon the ANC to the Right and launch an entirely independent political-cum-electoral project of its own. Yet what can the sustaining of a close linkage between the two organizations be expected to look like on what is now much more open political terrain? Note, too, that some of those most active in the 'new' CP—especially within the ranks of its fresh recruits—are amongst those also being looked to to revitalize the ANC itself.

Certainly, the CP does remain a prominent player within the ANC, as elections to the National Executive Committee were to reveal at the ANC's July conference (the aforementioned Mhlaba himself being amongst the strongest finishers in polling for the NEC, for example). More generally the conference, as anticipated, did allow for some changing of the guard within the ANC, elements from the internal movement—most notably from the erstwhile UDF—joining, and even

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<sup>74</sup> Pallo Jordan, 'The Crisis of Conscience in the SACP', *Transformation*, no. 11, 1990. For a contrasting and depressingly orthodox riposte to Slovo by a prominent long-time SACP activist, see Harry Gwala, 'Let us look at history in the round', *The African Communist*, no. 123, 1990.

<sup>75</sup> See Mike Morris, 'Why Are Anti-Stalinists Joining the SACP?', *SAL*, vol. 6, no. 3, December 1990.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in *Southwester*, 8 February 1991.

displacing, exile politicians in positions of prominence. Particularly dramatic was the elevation of so visible an internal actor as Cyril Ramaphosa, leader of the powerful National Union of Mineworkers, to the post of ANC secretary-general. At the same time, representatives with an Umkhonto we Sizwe background also found renewed prominence (these latter, in particular, pressing the case that more be done to ground a self-defence capacity in the townships).

In fact, 'representatives' of a very wide range of possible viewpoints were to be found on July's freshly minted NEC, the balances struck within the 'new' ANC being, if anything, even more delicate than those that had marked the old. In policy terms, a mandate for an increased politicization, from the ground up, of the negotiations process did emerge as the clearest and, in the light of present imperatives, the most positive outcome of the conference; here was to be found the firmest promise of the ANC's revitalization as a major shaper of the current moment. Less clear were the implications of such developments within the ANC for the probable manner of structuring a post-apartheid South Africa. The exigencies of the negotiations moment still tend to smooth over contradictions that could ultimately affect the movement's long-term socioeconomic policies; under such circumstances, divining the likely vocation of the new NEC regarding such issues remains a difficult task.<sup>77</sup> Significantly, the conference delegates themselves postponed any sustained discussion of these matters, and of the movement's possible electoral programme, to a 'special policy conference' promised for early 1992.

All of which may serve merely to reinforce the point that the political modalities of sustaining a process of long-term structural transformation are far from clear cut in present-day South Africa. For the moment one may merely conclude that the dialectic between the ANC and the broader movement does hold, albeit fraying somewhat as debate continues over how the balance between the two might best be struck.<sup>78</sup> Beyond that echoes the closely related debate, only touched on here (as, indeed, within the movement itself), over how best to concretize the pursuit of such transformation in policy terms—including within such crucial spheres of establishment power as the army/police, the media, the health sector, and the like, that there has not been space even to mention in the present article. Much has been accomplished in South Africa to bring the situation to its present point. But we should not underestimate the weaknesses of the popular movement that will now confront both capital and the remnants of the

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<sup>77</sup> In short, it remains extremely difficult to predict of any political revitalization the ANC itself may now experience just what will be the relative importance to be attached to broadly populist concerns (capable, at their worst, of taking on quite demagogic proportions) on the one hand and more pointedly socialist ones on the other. Related ambiguities attach to even so prominent a figure as Cyril Ramaphosa, himself a prominent trade unionist but as often as not to be found on the 'populist' wing of such 'populist-workerist' divisions as have been said, from time to time, to characterize the trade-union movement.

<sup>78</sup> 'Mass-based movement starts to rise on ashes of disillusionment': so *South African* headlines a recent article about the trend towards increased independence vis-à-vis the ANC on the part in unions, students and civics (30 May 1991), a trend likely to be accentuated, the paper argues, at COSATU's own July conference.

apartheid state and try to wrench a firm measure of reconstruction from them. Bracket off the fresh weaknesses being inflicted upon that movement by the harrowing realities of the negotiations moment (however much these may now be counterbalanced by the ANC's effectively seizing upon the renewed room for manoeuvre that 'Inkatha-gate' has granted it) and one still confronts both the complexity of the South African socioeconomic system and the (relative) paucity of skills relevant to the most demanding tasks of the next round. We must look to an ongoing process of empowerment, but we must also expect the signal advances that will be made to be harried by fresh contradictions and qualifications. And we must confront squarely the fact that either chaos or cooptation may be a more immediate prospect than the consolidation of a process of structural reform.

Launching and sustaining a process of 'structural reform' is merely a chance, then, even an outside chance, but the best chance for producing a socialist resolution to South Africa's travails—and not necessarily a bad chance either, by present global standards. The scenario sketched in the (admittedly speculative) final section of this article is less straightforward, certainly, than any maximalist left scenario for the immediate deliverance of a workers' party and a workers' state. But the identification in Section III of the components of a proto-revolutionary process of structural reform does begin to make sense of the most interesting currents in present-day South Africa. And it is these currents that offer, in turn, the best hope to the vast mass of South Africans for a transformation of their unenviable situation. Taps for revolution?—or a revolution for the nineties? Lester Bowie, the great American jazz trumpeter and long-time member of the avant-garde Art Ensemble of Chicago, was once asked by a sceptical critic if some particular innovation marked 'the end of jazz as we know it'. Bowie's response: 'That depends on what you know.'

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## The Regulation Approach: Theory and History

In the past two decades the French (or Paris) School of Economic Regulation has developed an ambitious historical-economic theory which has already had a major impact on efforts to understand the current malaise of the capitalist system and the accompanying economic transformations.<sup>1</sup> On the face of it, the School's favourable reception is not difficult to explain. The Theory of Regulation responds to the belief, widespread today, that orthodox economics has failed to interpret satisfactorily actual patterns of development, past or contemporary, and that, in particular, its tendency to economic determinism prevents it from taking into account in systematic fashion the powerful ways in which historically developed class relations, institutional forms and, more generally, political action have shaped the evolution of capitalist economies. For their part, then, the Regulationists explicitly seek to go beyond the ahistorical verities of neoclassical economics. Their relationship to Marxist approaches is less clear. Yet it would seem that their original intention was to grasp how networks of institutional forms, during the

successive epochs in which they held sway, have affected the expression of—or actually modified—the underlying tendencies or laws of capital accumulation as these have been analysed in the Marxist tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The Regulationists begin, methodologically, from the idea that the overly abstract and ineffectual character of much existing economic theory, as well as the undertheorized nature of much existing economic history, derive from 'insufficient links between theory and empirical analysis on the one hand and from purely deductive and inductive methods on the other'. Their fundamental goal is to provide those links through 'build[ing] a series of intermediate models' to make theory more historically concrete and empirically testable, as well as more useful for historical interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

The Regulationists thus deny that the capitalist mode of production is comprehensible in terms of a single set of laws that remain unchanged from its inception until its eventual supersession. They see the history of capitalism, rather, as a succession of phases, each distinguished by certain historically developed, socio-institutionally defined structural forms that give rise, so long as they are maintained, to distinctive economic trends and patterns. There is an obvious similarity to the Marxist project of grasping history more generally in terms of a series of historically developed modes of production, each marked by a structure of social-property relations that give rise, so long as it is

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<sup>1</sup> This article does not pretend to provide an inventory of the large and disparate family of perspectives that are today styled 'regulationist' by their proponents, let alone to review the myriad works of an empirical or theoretical nature that claim in some way to be inspired by one or another version of 'Regulation Theory'. Our aim is rather to evaluate, as systematically as possible, one quite distinct and coherent perspective, which has as its founding statement M. Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (orig. pub. 1976), London 1979, and which is continued today, perhaps most prominently, in the works of Robert Boyer and Alain Lipietz, as well as Benjamin Coriat, J. Mistral and others. We have made every effort, therefore, to present the ideas of these authors as fully and coherently as possible. For a superb introduction to this strand of Regulation Theory, to which we are much indebted, see Mike Davis's extended review article, '“Fordism” in Crisis: a Review of Michel Aglietta's *Régulation et crise: L'expérience des États Unis*', in *Review* (Binghampton), II, Fall 1978.

The authors wish to express their appreciation to Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy for their helpful comments and their release of data. Mark Glick wishes to acknowledge that his contribution to this project relies strongly on earlier research with Dumenil and Levy. We are also especially grateful to Dick Walker for reading and commenting extensively on two successive drafts, and for allowing us to make use of and refer to several of his papers in advance of publication. We would like to thank further Perry Anderson, Mike Davis, Diane Elson and Mike Parker for reading various drafts and offering valuable suggestions and criticisms.

<sup>2</sup> Aglietta's founding statement of the theory of regulation attempts to present it on systematically Marxist foundations. Lipietz has more or less followed in this tradition. Boyer, on the other hand, in his very useful summary of the Regulationists' main theses — 'Technical Change and the Theory of "Regulation"', in G. Dosi et al., eds., *Technical Change and Economic Theory*, London 1988 — aims for 'a new theoretical framework which would combine a critique of Marxian orthodoxy and an extension of Kaleckian and Keynesian macroeconomic ideas, in order to rejuvenate a variant of early institutional or historical theory' (p. 70). Still, Boyer elsewhere says: 'Making use of long-term or medium-term history to enrich and elaborate Marxian intuitions such is the goal of Regulationist approaches.' *Le Théorie de la Régulation: Une Analyse Critique*, Paris 1986, p. 41 (our translation).

<sup>3</sup> Boyer, 'Technical Change', p. 70. Cf. Boyer, *Théorie de la Régulation*, pp. 36, 41.



maintained, to distinctive forms of economic behaviour and systemic laws of motion. Indeed, the Regulationists' key concepts of *modes of regulation* and *regimes of accumulation* can be seen to function with respect to the Regulationists' phases within capitalist history—called *modes of development*—rather analogously to the way in which the Marxist concepts *social relations of production* and *forces of production* function with respect to the modes of production. Moreover, just as a number of recent Marxist theorists refuse to see the fundamental social-property structures that constitute a mode of production as either technologically or economically determined or as following a unilineal pattern of evolution, the Regulationists similarly insist that the structural forms that constitute their modes (or phases) of development within the history of capitalism must be understood as the outcome, to a significant degree, of class and political struggles.

It is the purpose of this essay to analyse and evaluate the Regulationists' theory in terms of their own distinctive aspirations by examining, theoretically and historically, the conceptual links that they have actually constructed between high theory and economic history, and specifically the series of 'intermediate models' through which they have sought to understand capitalist development. Let us therefore begin by surveying the basic concepts and the main theoretical-historical results of the School.

## I Basic Concepts and Fundamental Results

Each *regime of accumulation* represents a distinct pattern of economic evolution which, though limited in historical time, is relatively stable. The immediate source of the dynamic specific to each regime of accumulation is a particular series of regularities which include: (i) the pattern of productive organization within firms which defines the wage-earners' work with the means of production; (ii) the time horizon for decisions about capital formation; (iii) the distribution of income among wages, profits and taxes; (iv) the volume and composition of effective demand; and (v) the connection between capitalism and non-capitalist modes of production.<sup>4</sup> What is distinctive about the Regulationists' standpoint is that the content of the regularities defining the pattern of economic growth that constitutes a regime of accumulation is viewed largely as an expression of institutional structures governing intra- and inter-firm relations, the relations among capitals and the relationship between capital and labour—namely, the *mode of regulation*. (Regularity (v) seems to sit somewhat uneasily with the others, since it obviously cannot be grasped simply as a function of capitalist institutions, and this is a point to which we shall have to return.)

Each *mode of regulation* is constituted by a historically developed,

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<sup>4</sup> Boyer, 'Technical Change', pp. 70–71; A. Lipietz, 'Behind the Crisis. The Exhaustion of a Regime of Accumulation. A "Regulation School" Perspective on Some French Empirical Works', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, xviii, Spring and Summer 1986, pp. 15–16.

relatively integrated network of institutions that reproduces the fundamental capitalist property relationships, guides the prevailing regime of accumulation, and helps make compatible the myriad decentralized decisions, potentially contradictory and conflictual, taken by the economy's individual units. It functions, in particular, so as to achieve 'a certain match between the transformation of the conditions of production (volume of capital employed, distribution between branches, and norms of production) and transformation in the conditions of final consumption (norms of consumption of wage workers and other social classes, collective expenditures).' The network of institutions that compose the mode of regulation governs the accumulation process by establishing: (i) the nature of the capital-wage labour nexus and (ii) the type of inter-capitalist competition, as well as (iii) the character of monetary and credit relationships, (iv) the manner of adhesion of the firms of the national economy to the international economy, and (v) the forms of the state's intervention into the economy.<sup>5</sup> In fact, in the actual working out of their theory, the Regulationists have focused primarily on the first two of these institutional nexuses. Indeed: 'one of the many structural forms emerges as being especially important: *wage/labour relations*... the process of socialization of productive activity under capitalism', that is, 'the network of legal and institutional conditions governing the use and reproduction of the workforce'. As Boyer sums up, 'this concept is sufficiently broad for us to be able to anticipate a priori close linkages between the form of wage/labour relations and the method of regulation' and the great 'extent to which economic crisis and change in wage/labour relations determine one another'.<sup>6</sup>

The combination of mode of regulation with regime of accumulation gives rise, from the Regulationist standpoint, to a distinctive *mode of development*, with a distinctive type of cyclical, non-threatening and self-regulating crisis. The extension in time of each mode of development ultimately issues in a series of ever more crippling contradictions, which result from the fetters imposed by the already-existing mode of regulation upon the regime of accumulation. As the mode of development reproduces itself, hitherto virtuous circles thus give way to increasingly vicious circles. The outcome is a *structural crisis*, which—precisely because the old mode of regulation has broken down—is accompanied by the necessarily *unregulated* and *conflictual* action of classes, firms, political groups and governments. Out of these historically indeterminate processes of competitive economic war and socioeconomic and political struggle, one out of a range of alternative resolutions of the crisis is eventually hit upon. A new, historically given mode of regulation—which, by governing the historically developed regime of accumulation, makes possible a new mode of development—is the result.

The Regulation School developed the foregoing battery of concepts in

<sup>5</sup> Boyer, 'Technical Change', pp. 71–5; Lipietz, 'Behind the Crisis', p. 15 (quotation).

<sup>6</sup> R. Boyer, 'Wage/Labour Relations, Growth, and Crisis: A Hidden Dialectic', in R. Boyer, ed., *The Search for Labour Market Flexibility: The European Economies in Transition*, Oxford 1988, p. 10.

close connection with its ongoing investigation of the various historical phases of capitalist development. Essentially, it has come to specify two regimes of accumulation—the extensive and the intensive—and two modes of regulation—the competitive and the monopoly. Under the extensive regime of accumulation, growth takes place predominantly on the basis of artisanal productive techniques via the application of methods of lengthening the working day and intensifying labour, as well as expanding the size of the labour force. Productivity growth is therefore limited, as is the potential for mass consumption. Under the intensive regime, growth takes place predominantly via investment in fixed capital embodying technical advance—which creates the potential for regular increases both in productivity and in mass consumption. The competitive mode of regulation is distinguished from the monopoly mode, most crudely, as follows: in the former, there is craft control and the competitive determination of prices and especially of wages; in the latter, there is scientific management, an oligopolistic system of pricing, and, most characteristically, the determination of wages through a complex system of capital-labour and governmental institutions—the social regulation of the mode of consumption.

On the basis of this typology, the Regulationists have come to identify three successive modes of development in the economic history of Western capitalism over the last century and a half, each representing a distinctive combination of one of the foregoing modes of regulation and one of the foregoing regimes of accumulation. First, through most of the nineteenth century, a competitive mode of regulation prevailed and imposed an extensive regime of accumulation. Second, under the pressure of class struggle and technical change, there arose at various historical junctures—from the first decades of the twentieth century in the United States—a new mode of development. Here, craft control was sufficiently weakened and inter-firm competition sufficiently controlled to allow for the emergence of intensive accumulation. However, this new mode of development turned out to be unstable because the mode of regulation, still essentially competitive, was unable to institutionalize the expanding mass consumption that was required to underpin the expanding mass production made possible by intensive accumulation. The result was the severe structural crisis—conceived as a crisis of overinvestment and underconsumption—of the interwar period, leading to the depression of the 1930s. Thirdly, especially in consequence of the class struggles of the 1930s, there emerged a new mode of regulation which finally made possible the full flowering of intensive accumulation and an unprecedentedly successful period of capitalist development. This monopoly mode of regulation resolved the contradictions of the previous mode of development by providing for the rise of mass consumption and thereby constituted the foundations for a new mode of development called 'Fordist'. However, the historical repetition of the very processes that had underwritten prosperity eventually proved problematic, as the progressive perfection of the Fordist labour process resulted in the exhaustion of the system's capacity for developing the productive forces and for underwriting the steady growth of productivity. The

upshot was the structural crisis of the Fordist mode of development—conceived above all as a crisis of productivity—that we are experiencing today.<sup>7</sup>

In the remainder of this article, we shall consider, one by one, each of the aforementioned modes of development, their structural crises and the transitions between them. In each case we shall proceed by: (1) clarifying each mode's developmental logic and empirical basis from the Regulationists' standpoint; (2) critically interrogating its conceptual status; and (3) investigating its empirical warrant, especially with respect to what Aglietta terms the exemplary case, that of the United States.

## II Mode of Development One: Competitive Regulation and Extensive Accumulation

The mode of development characteristic of the United States and parts of Europe until at least the early decades of the twentieth century expressed the predominance of a *competitive mode of regulation*, which governed a *regime of extensive accumulation*.

### 1. The Economic Consequences of Extensive Accumulation Governed by Competitive Regulation

Under extensive accumulation, production was characteristically based on artisanal labour. Management, for its part, operated in terms of short time-horizons and limited its placements of fixed capital. As a result, new capital investment tended to embody extant productive techniques, rather than transformed ones. There was, of course, 'significant use of science in production processes, but firms mainly tr[ie]d to apply existing knowledge to their business and d[id] not strive to improve them continuously.'<sup>8</sup> The overall outcome, in Aglietta's words, was that 'under the regime of extensive accumulation . . . *absolute surplus-value predominates*' and 'the length of the working day is the principal means of extracting surplus labour'.<sup>9</sup> Growth was therefore made possible predominantly by means of extending and intensifying labour, a spectacular increase in the labour force, and a dramatic expansion of the system in geographical space.

Extensive accumulation is explicable, from the Regulationist standpoint, in terms of the overarching competitive mode of regulation that maintained and governed it. It was the institutionalized forms of capital-capital and capital-labour relationships constituted by competitive regulation that were responsible for restricted capital investment and limited growth of the productive forces. These fetters upon capital accumulation came in part from the supply side. Within firms, craft workers were able to exert considerable control over the labour process, thereby limiting management's freedom to introduce

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<sup>7</sup> For a succinct summary of these propositions, see Boyer, 'Technical Change'. Cf. Lipietz, 'Behind the Crisis', p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Boyer, 'Technical Change', pp. 79–80.

<sup>9</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 130, emphasis added.

innovations in production. Capital-capital or inter-firm relations were characterized by cutthroat competition among many uncoordinated units, so that the investment environment displayed a high degree of risk and uncontrollability. Forced to prioritize short-term returns, management shied away from technical changes requiring large-scale placements of fixed capital and from extensive expenditures on research and development.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, from the standpoint of the Regulationists, the key fetter was to be found on the side of demand. Competitive regulation allowed levels of direct exploitation in the labour process sufficient to support ongoing capital accumulation. At the same time, it imposed strict limits on the growth of mass consumption, which decisively cramped the trajectory of capital accumulation. These demand-side constraints derived, on the one hand, from the relationship of early capital accumulation to its non-capitalist environment, and, on the other hand, from the institutions governing the capital-labour relationship within capitalism itself.

In this view of things, the working class, until at least the beginning of the twentieth century, secured much of its means of reproduction from outside the sphere of commodity production, apparently from its relationship to still-largely non-capitalist rural households and villages. The workers' 'environment [was] characterized by close relationships between town and country, by a rhythm of work punctuated by season and stabilized by custom, by an incomplete separation between productive and domestic activities, and by a *domination of non-commodity relations over commodity relations in the mode of consumption*—non-commodity relations finding the conditions for their existence within the extended family and neighbourhood community.' This 'reconstitution of labour-power by a non-capitalist environment in which it [was] still inserted...ma[de] it possible to pay very low wages and impose very long working hours.'<sup>21</sup> For these reasons, the workers could constitute only a strictly limited market for consumer goods.

Moreover, the very processes by which precapitalist societies were dissolved themselves exerted a downward pressure on wages. Direct producers were rendered dependent upon the purchase of commodities for their reproduction, and their separation *en masse* from direct non-market access to their means of subsistence had the effect of depressing working-class incomes and consuming power. Workers from rural villages and small towns flooded the great US industrial cities, where they were joined by wave after wave of immigrants from Europe and Asia.<sup>22</sup> When workers finally entered the overstocked capitalist labour market, they found the institutional forms governing capital-labour relations stacked against them. Under competitive regulation, an essentially unregulated labour market, marked by

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<sup>20</sup> Boyer, 'Technical Change', pp. 71-5.

<sup>21</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 80. Boyer comments that, 'in the last century[,] most of the consumption of the workers came from non-capitalist modes of production.' Boyer, 'Technical Change', p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 81.

limited unionization and little intervention of the state to maintain labour-power, prevailed. The result was, again, powerful downward pressure on wages, limiting consumer demand.

For the Regulationists, restricted consumer demand, resulting from competitive regulation, provides the key not only to the first mode of development, but to their entire historical conception of capitalist evolution. On the one hand, a necessary *prerequisite* for the full flowering of mass production is the rise of mass consumption; but on the other hand, the rise of mass consumption cannot be brought about merely by transforming production, the labour process.<sup>13</sup> In consequence, the establishment of mass production of the means of working-class consumption depends upon the success of sociopolitical struggles in setting up institutions to guarantee the working-class norm of consumption. It was thus 'the transformation of the conditions of existence of the working class which *enabled* methods of relative surplus-value production to be generalized throughout Department II.'<sup>14</sup> Capitalists would not make the investments to transform the labour process and develop the forces of production in the department producing consumption goods unless and until there had emerged a mass market for its products; this required 'the establishment of social controls to guarantee the formation of the working-class norm of consumption'.<sup>15</sup> Aglietta thus emphasizes time and again the 'need for a comprehensive linkage between the two departments of production, and the absence of any automatic mechanism to balance their development'.<sup>16</sup> In the absence of such a linkage, the effect of technical change originating in Department I on Department II will be doubly limited: Department II will fail to adopt the new methods; goods produced in Department II will fail to decrease in price, cutting off a corresponding increase in real wages. Aglietta's logical conclusion is that the historical appearance of sufficient effective demand to underwrite the mass production of working-class consumption goods is ultimately 'linked to the way in which the class struggle either succeeds or does not succeed in revolutionizing the conditions of production and exchange, and consequently in calling forth an expansion in the mass of commodities produced'.<sup>17</sup>

So long, then, as competitive regulation prevailed, its capital-labour relationship prevented any definitive break beyond the regime of extensive accumulation and made possible, at best, a highly punctuated growth of Department I. As Aglietta spells out the macroeconomics of the Regulationists' first mode of development: 'As long as capitalism transforms the labour process by the creation of collective means of production, but without reshaping the mode of consumption, accumulation still progresses only in fits and starts. The

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<sup>13</sup> '... commodities can only form part of the consumption norm if their unit exchange-value is on the decline and already sufficiently low. The condition in which these commodities are produced must therefore be those of the standardized labour process of mass production. [But] for this to be the case, the social demand for these branches of output must be sufficiently large and rapidly rising.' Ibid., pp. 84-5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 97, emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 158. Cf. p. 197.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 154-5.

regime of accumulation is principally an *extensive* one, based on the build up of heavy industry section by section. The resultant jerkiness is a function of the uneven development of Department I.<sup>18</sup>

### The US as Exemplary Case

The fact remains that, in the Regulationist schema, growth could and did proceed relatively successfully under the mode of development in which competitive regulation governed *extensive* accumulation because capital had access to enormous regions with inexhaustible supplies of raw materials and cheap labour power. According to Aglietta, the 'exemplary nation' of this mode of economic development was the United States, from the late eighteenth century right through World War I and beyond. Here growth took place largely according to the 'frontier principle', focused on the securing of valuable minerals and cheap agricultural products. It based itself most especially on the technical and commercial dynamism of farmer (owner-operator) capitalism. The rise of this system of property relations was conditioned by relatively easy access to land, insured in the initial class and anti-colonial struggles of the new republic, and consolidated through the efforts of powerful speculators and railroad developers. Agricultural output thus grew by leaps and bounds throughout the final two thirds of the nineteenth century, as the economy expanded in space and registered spectacular increases in agricultural productivity. Meanwhile, mining developed apace to exploit the mineral deposits that were discovered in one frontier region after another. Both agriculture and mining stimulated, and were stimulated by, the dynamic growth of railroads, perhaps the key Department I industry in Aglietta's account of the nineteenth century and itself a powerful stimulus to iron, steel and coal production.

The continuity of this process was made possible by wave after wave of cheap, unorganized labourers, recruited from the farms and from abroad. Labouring under terrible conditions, these workers were compelled to cede most of an output that was made to grow largely through the intensification of labour and the extension of the working day, and not primarily through productivity increases and the growth of the organic composition of capital.<sup>19</sup> In the end, therefore, the long-term tendency of the mode of development based on extensive accumulation and competitive regulation was, in Boyer's words, that 'productivity is quasi-stagnating, so are real wages, while . . . growth is only obtained by a lengthening of the working hours or by the hiring of more workers.'<sup>20</sup> But the consummation of that tendency could, in the US at least, be put off for a lengthy period through the exploitation of the extraordinary opportunities offered by the frontier.

## 2. Competitive Regulation and Extensive Accumulation: A Mode of Development under Capitalism?

The initial mode of development in the Regulationists' schema of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 72-9; Lipietz, 'Behind the Crisis', pp. 16-17; Davis, 'Fordism in Crisis', pp. 217-22.

<sup>20</sup> Boyer, 'Technical Change', p. 80.

phases of capitalist evolution is thus constituted by a regime of accumulation based primarily upon the extraction of absolute surplus-value that results from the mode of competitive regulation. Such a model, however, with its characteristic fetters on technological change and mass consumption, appears puzzling in the light of what we know, or thought we knew, about the basic traits of the capitalist mode of production—specifically, our view of the normal forms of individual economic behaviour and of the aggregate patterns of economic growth that result from the prevalence of capitalist social-property relations *per se*. First, what sort of capitalism is it in which the extraction of absolute surplus-value is predominant? Second, what sort of historically extended process of capital accumulation is it that takes place without significant increases in both the real wage and aggregate consumption? Thirdly, why should the scope and intensity of capital accumulation in this phase be limited by the lack of institutionally insured levels of consumption? The point is not that it is conceptually impossible to specify specific socioeconomic environments or institutional conditions in which capitalist development might take place predominantly on the basis of absolute surplus-value, or where accumulation might occur without a corresponding growth of consumption, or where restricted consumption might hinder further investment. The question that needs to be asked is, on what basis can the Regulationists posit an entire, normal, initial phase of institutionally determined development—an entire epoch—in which capitalist social-property relations have been fully established, yet which operates predominantly by intensifying labour and lengthening the working day, keeps working-class wages and aggregate consumption from rising, and finds the road to mass production blocked by restricted mass consumption?

The Regulationists' answer, as already implied, would appear to rest simply upon: one, the modifying effects of the broader pre-capitalist socioeconomic environment within which their first mode of development historically emerged; and two, the structuring effects of the network of capitalist institutions constituted by the competitive mode of regulation itself. Still, given that both sets of effects are supposed to have actually reversed or cancelled out fundamental developmental tendencies widely understood to be built into capitalist social-property relations *per se*, the Regulationists should—one would think—have felt obliged not only to treat more explicitly the paradoxical character of their result, but also to make much more clear the manner by which they arrived at it. For, where capitalist social-property relations are fully established, we can, all else being equal, expect to find: development on the basis of relative surplus-value; long-term capital accumulation bringing about rises in wages and aggregate consumption; and investment and cost-cutting technical change leading to, but not necessarily conditioned by, growth of the mass market. It will be our argument, in fact, that the Regulationists have reached their conclusions in essentially two ways: by focusing on some, but ignoring other, economic effects of the institutions of extensive accumulation and competitive regulation; and by assuming, without sufficient justification, that certain tendencies arising from the environment constituted by the competitive mode of regulation—either its broader historically



determined precapitalist socioeconomic setting or the historically specific structure of capitalist institutions—will have sufficient quantitative weight to set their mark on the overall path of development, the regime of accumulation.

### Competition, Risk and Investment

Let us consider first the Regulationists' contention that the capital-capital institutional structure characterized by a multitude of decentralized, competitive firms tended to stifle the investment in fixed capital required for technical change and that, for this reason, it tended to bias individual enterprises toward profit-making through the methods of increasing absolute surplus-value and the system as a whole toward extensive accumulation. It is undoubtedly true, as the Regulationists argue, that capitalists have found the risk of investing in fixed capital under fiercely competitive conditions to pose significant problems for capital accumulation and thus technical change. Yet most previous interpreters of capitalist development, whether Marxist or non-Marxist, implicitly or explicitly, have assumed that, since the origins of capitalism itself, the same competitive environment has tended to make such investment unavoidable. They have done so for the obvious reason that inter-capitalist competition is thought to impose, in tendency if not in every individual case, an inexorable pressure on firms to maximize cost-cutting so as to realize temporary surplus profits or technological rents, thereby maintaining themselves against competitors, and to accrue sufficient surpluses for adequate further investment. Those firms that do not sufficiently reduce costs are forced out of business. The constraint imposed upon investment by risk has thus appeared to be a strictly relative one, incapable in itself of constituting any long-term barrier to development by the methods of increasing relative surplus-value.

It should perhaps be noted in passing that, although the level of fixed capital commitment required for increasingly advanced production, for technical change, has unquestionably risen over time, it has done so unevenly, and hardly universally. The classic counter-example is the revolution in agricultural production of the sixteenth through the eighteenth century in England. This brought about major reductions in food costs, with epoch-making repercussions for economic development, largely by way of increased specialization and the reorganization of farms requiring significant but, in absolute terms, not very large capital investments. In manufacturing itself, moreover, the history of technical change has by no means been confined to the growth of machinofacture requiring greater capital investment, but has also, to a significant degree, been constituted by processes of productivity advance carried out through the extension of the division of labour in manufacture (the break-up of tasks into ever simpler components/the growth of detail labour), the perfection of cooperation, and the reorganization of production so as to make more efficient use of raw materials, tools and labour-power. (See, in the recent period, just-in-time production.) Throughout the history of capitalism, then, growth has tended, to an important (if limited) extent, to take place on the basis of extending relative surplus-value even without major investments in fixed capital.

The really fundamental point, however, is that while the initial investment required for successful innovative accumulation has tended to rise throughout the history of capitalism, entrepreneurs and their financiers have found it sensible to assume the risk. For the disincentive resulting from the need to put out, over time, ever greater amounts of fixed capital has been more than compensated by the profit incentives of technical innovation (as well as potential negative sanctions that could result from failure to stay ahead of one's competitors). Simply put: the increased potential rate of return from investments in innovations has, sooner or later, more than counterbalanced the increased degree of risk.

The classic case is, of course, the industrial revolution itself, which amounted to the transition from domestic putting-out manufacture to the factory system. This required entrepreneurs to move from a system based almost entirely on circulating capital—where the capitalist supplied raw materials and wages (or credit) to workers who possessed the means of production—to a system based heavily on fixed capital in which the capitalist owned increasingly substantial assets in plant and equipment (buildings and machinery). The need for a radically increased commitment to fixed capital assets did unquestionably constitute a significant initial disincentive to eighteenth-century British entrepreneurs, accustomed as they were to short-term investments in production where the direct producers bore most of the risk (and particularly of the losses from cyclical downturns in the market). Nevertheless, it took place, for example, in cotton manufacturing, with the rise of the factory. Nor did the increased risks bound up with fixed-capital requirements prove more than a relative barrier to investment during the subsequent epoch of the power loom, the steam engine, the railroad, and so on. From the very first stages of industrialization, capitalism showed itself capable of overcoming barriers to investment in fixed capital to the extent that such investment could yield greater profits, and thus of developing on the basis of relative surplus-value. Indeed, the common-sense assumption of the most diverse currents of economic theory is that inter-firm competition requiring cost-cutting and profit maximization has been *the* central mechanism behind capitalist innovation and the key to capitalism's unique capacity systematically to develop the productive forces.

It needs finally to be emphasized that capitalist entrepreneurs have constantly transformed capitalist institutions precisely in order to cope with the growing requirements of fixed capital investment. This is, in a very general sense, what the Regulationists are arguing. However, they see such institutional innovation as associated with, indeed dependent upon, a qualitative economy-wide institutional transformation that made for a qualitative break in capitalist evolution beyond the initial phase of merely extensive accumulation governed by competitive regulation to a new mode of development, rather than as inherent in the system of capitalist social-property relations itself. Institutional transformation to facilitate technical change should be seen as an evolutionary feature of capitalist manufacturing per se, rather analogous to, and running parallel with, the process of technical

change itself—and, like technical change, arising from a field of natural selection characterized by cost-cutting competition between firms. As a result of such innovation, capitalist economic history has witnessed one institutional advance after another—joint stock companies, limited partnerships, corporations, regulated banks, bankruptcy laws, vertical integration, horizontal integration in conglomerates—as requirements have increased for the mobilization of capital, the time horizon for investment, the control over the investment environment, and so forth.

It is true that institutions have hardly evolved continuously or automatically, but neither has productive technique. The point is simply that institutional changes needed, at successive points, to facilitate the fixed capital investment for technical change can and have taken place, throughout the history of capitalism, as has technical change itself, in a piecemeal and local fashion—expressing the initiative of individual capitalists, or groups of capitalists, sometimes aided by the state. In order to show why such institutional innovations should be excluded from their putative long phase of extensive accumulation, or why they should have had to await some all-at-once transition from extensive to intensive accumulation, the Regulationists would have had to demonstrate that the institutions constituting the competitive mode of regulation somehow had the effect of putting a damper on institutional changes. And this they have not been able to do. In the end, the Regulationists have not only failed adequately to demonstrate why intense competition between decentralized firms would actually have restricted fixed capital investment for technical change; they have similarly failed to show that the system did not, from the start and more or less regularly (though, again, not continuously), actually improve its institutions for making such investments within the broader competitive environment.

### Craft Control, Fixed Capital Investment and Technical Change

There is no reason to deny that workers' resistance has constituted a fetter on the placement of fixed capital embodying technical advances, more or less powerful according to historical circumstances; nor that skilled workers have sought to make use of their relative scarcity and their relative indispensability for management within the labour process to organize their self-defence against capital, and specifically against the introduction of machinery requiring labour of lower specific weight. Yet, it is very difficult to understand how the Regulationists can move from propositions of this general sort to the assertion that control over the labour process exerted by craft workers constituted an institutionally founded barrier of sufficient solidity and breadth to structure an extensive regime of capital accumulation, one which, in their account, was mostly restricted to the extraction of absolute surplus-value, over an entire historical epoch.

At the heart of the Regulationist argument is the view that the rise of scientific management or Taylorism-Fordism—in association with the rise of the corporation and oligopoly—constituted a moment of discontinuity in the development of mechanization, deskilling and

capitalist control over the labour process that was sufficiently sharp to mark—indeed partially to bring about—the transition from one regime of accumulation to the next. In Lipietz's words,

The 1848–1914 period is mainly characterized . . . by a simple extension of productive capacity without a dramatic change in the organic composition or in productivity . . . In the twenties a revolution in the mode of organization of work was generalized in the United States and partially in Europe: *Taylorism*. It consisted of an expropriation, by a gigantic and capillary deepening of the capitalist control of the labour process, of the know-how of the collective workers, a know-how which was henceforth systematized by engineers and technicians according to the methods of the 'scientific management of work'. A further step was the incorporation of this know-how into the automatic system of machines, which dictated the method of work to the workers who had thus been robbed of initiative: such was the *productive watershed of 'Fordism'*.<sup>21</sup>

It is difficult to know just what to make of this argument, which is essential to the Regulationists' attempt to specify institutional foundations for distinctive regimes of accumulation, but which seems to fly in the face of the ABC of capitalist development. The Regulationists seem to be attributing to class conflict over control of the labour process a radical autonomy from, and a determinative role in, the process of capital accumulation. On that basis, a qualitative, once-and-for-all transformation in the balance of class forces and the nature of technical change is supposed to have occurred at the time of the Taylor–Ford revolution, enabling an epochal break to accumulation predominantly on the basis of relative surplus-value. It is as if craft control—or, more broadly, control exerted by skilled workers—was, with respect to the accumulation of capital, all-powerful before, and obliterated after, the advent of Taylor and Ford. But such an extreme and discontinuous account of the development of control over the labour process would appear impossible to sustain.

The Regulationists appear largely to ignore the general fact that ever since the Industrial Revolution, if not before, the capitalist labour process has been transformed and re-transformed through new techniques that have brought greater profitability to individual firms by providing greater efficiency (greater outputs for given inputs), not merely by—and often irrespective of—eliciting more intense or more protracted labour inputs. Capitalist entrepreneurs, seeking to stay in business, were driven to adopt these techniques because they cut unit costs (without requiring greater exploitation, although they of course often facilitated it).<sup>22</sup> Workers might, on occasion, succeed in limiting

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<sup>21</sup> Lipietz, 'Behind the Crisis', pp. 16–17. According to Boyer, '[F]rom 1895 to 1920, average productivity is quasi-stagnating . . . Along with authors like Braverman and Coriat, the "regulation" approach insists upon the so-called Taylorian revolution. During the 1920s, productivity speeds up, more than usual after such an episode.' 'Technical Change', pp. 80–82.

<sup>22</sup> 'Large-scale industry tore aside the veil that concealed from men their own social process of production. . . . Its principle, which is to view each process of production in and for itself, and to resolve it into its constituent elements without looking first at the ability of the human hand to perform the new processes, brought into existence the whole of the modern science of technology. The varied, apparently unconnected and

the introduction of such techniques, in a given industry in a given locale, sometimes for a significant period; but they could not in principle—and certainly not indefinitely—do so over the entire breadth of a manufacturing economy. Once one or a few firms in an industry adopted the more efficient technique, others would have to follow or go out of business, and there was little workers could do. From this vantage point, although the process of technological change is incomprehensible in abstraction from class struggle over the labour process, it is quite wrong to believe that workers' shopfloor control, expressing workers' class power, could come close to limiting fixed capital investment and technical change over the sort of major epoch defined by the Regulationists as characterized by predominantly extensive accumulation.

Long before the era of Taylorist-Fordist transformations, new machines, representing enormous advances in productive efficiency, had been more or less regularly—though certainly not continually—coming into use. For the reasons we have seen, skilled workers could not systematically, or over any length of time, prevent the accompanying series of gigantic transformations of the labour process—changes that resulted in massive devaluations of handicraft skill, significant intensification of labour, and major reductions of workers' job control. In one famous formulation, 'As long as machine production expands in a given branch of industry at the expense of the old handicrafts or of manufacture, the result is as certain as is the result of an encounter between an army with breach-loading rifles and one with bows and arrows.' What else are we to make of the initial industrial revolution in cotton, with its world-historical cutting of production costs and its devastating destruction of artisanal labour? How else are we to understand Marx's analysis of 'Machinofacture' in *Capital* (published in 1867), which theorizes already-accomplished (though necessarily incomplete) processes of destruction of handicraft labour, subordination of workers to machines, and intensification of labour that were the consequence of the introduction of cost-cutting machinery and were every bit as spectacular as—and in many respects quite analogous to—the processes that occurred under the impetus of Taylorism-Fordism? The upshot is that the major transformations of the labour process that took place in United States manufacturing from the late nineteenth century are incomprehensible if they are conceived as a transition from one to another regime of capital accumulation. On the contrary, they represented a further phase of an ongoing, though hardly continuous, evolution. And, as with earlier phases, they in part reflected an independent technological dynamic whose results were, in many cases, in no significant way conditional upon capital's previous success in assaulting the bastions of skilled

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<sup>22</sup> (*cont.*)

petrified forms of the social production process were now dissolved into conscious and planned applications of natural science, divided up systematically in accordance with the particular useful effect aimed at in each case. . . . By means of machinery, chemical processes and other methods, it is continually transforming not only the technical basis of production but also the functions of the worker and the social combinations of the labour process.' K. Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, Harmondsworth 1976, pp. 616–17.

workers' control, but which nonetheless had the effect of radically undermining those bastions.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, precisely because the introduction of machinery is not merely about the eliciting of increased worker inputs, but quite often centrally about increases in efficiency, whatever their consequence for labour inputs, mechanization often brings with it a requirement for new skills and thereby even the potential for a certain weakening of managerial control. The capitalist mode of production does possess a systematic tendency or bias toward embodying increases in productive power, technical advances, in machinery rather than in human beings, all else being equal. This is because, given free labour, capitalists find it hard to insure that they will secure the gains from investments in 'human capital': workers may move to another firm. It is also because skilled workers are, as a rule, more difficult to exploit. But the fact that machine-using technical changes are much to be preferred to skill-using technical changes of the same level of efficiency will not prevent capitalists from bringing in inventions which may even increase the use of skilled labour (especially at the start), if so doing will yield a higher rate of profit. In any case, the mechanization processes of the Taylor/Ford era, with their accompanying transformations in the labour process, both destroyed skills born out of earlier

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<sup>23</sup> The quotation is from *Capital* Volume 1, p. 578. It is worthy of note that F.W. Taylor first achieved international fame by developing, in collaboration with Maunsell White, a landmark technique to create tools that could cut metals at speeds four to six times faster than in the past, thus opening the way for the devastation of skilled labour in this field. As David Montgomery explains: 'The operators of those machines found themselves at a loss to know what could be expected of them. Taylor's colleague Carl Barth provided the answer in another set of experiments on cutting speeds and feeds, using high-speed steel, from which he developed a twelve-variable slide rule for use in determining proper machine settings. Armed with the slide rule, machine-shop employers were in a position to command.' *The Fall of the House of Labor*, New York 1987, pp. 230-32.

The Regulationists seem to draw directly on Braverman, who precedes them in focusing almost exclusively on the Taylorist-Fordist initiatives of 1890 to 1930, in attributing these (in a manner that is not entirely clear) to the rise of 'monopoly capital', in neglecting the previous, extensive revolutions in the labour process, and in offering little analysis of the relationship of the development of science and technology to the transformation of production and productiveness. See H. Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, New York 1974. We have been much helped by, and wish to express our indebtedness to, T. Elger, 'Valorisation and "Deskilling": A Critique of Braverman', *Capital and Class*, Spring 1979. For the destruction of skills that had given craft workers extensive control over the labour process, and the subsequent emergence of skills of a rather different sort during the nineteenth century, see G. Steedman-Jones, 'Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution', *MLA* 90, March-April 1975, p. 37.

Finally, to avoid misunderstanding, we should state, very explicitly, that we in no way wish to substitute a misleading—and unduly pessimistic—noion of infinite or perfect capitalist flexibility for the Regulationists' misleading notion of craft control as capable of constituting a qualitative barrier to technical advance sufficient to establish (in connection with a few other institutional forms) a distinct phase of (extensive) accumulation. Obviously, in many cases, the geographical scope for successful investment in given technical changes is significantly restricted, for technical, social and other reasons. As a result, groups of workers can, of course, for greater or lesser periods, prevent the introduction of new techniques (as well as defend other aspects of their position). Much clearly depends on the specific potentials for competition from other regions or nations

mechanization and themselves called into being new skills. 'Skilled workers'—a term of such elasticity as to stretch from handicraftsmen to the semi-skilled operatives of some modern factories—were neither so central to the labour process before the Taylorist-Fordist revolution, nor so totally peripheral after it, to have constituted the focus for the transition to intensive accumulation. As a central institution of the competitive mode of regulation, the pre-Taylorist 'craft-controlled' labour process cannot do the work of structuring 'extensive accumulation' that is required of it by the Theory of Regulation.

### From Competitive Regulation to Restricted Consumption?

Let us now move from the Regulationists' account of the supply side to their more central theses about the two ways in which competitive regulation fettered the growth of consumer demand: first, the depressing effect of the precapitalist environment and of unregulated capital-labour relations on the potential growth of wages and aggregate consumption; second, the restrictive effect of the limited growth of mass consumption on the growth of mass production.

The Regulationists advance the notion of an epoch of accumulation where workers' real wages were prevented from rising and mass consumption stagnated. They ascribe these effects to: (i) workers' access to the means of subsistence through direct links to households and villages of the precapitalist countryside; (ii) the oversupply of labour resulting from wave upon wave of immigration from largely non-capitalist rural areas, both at home and from abroad; and (iii) the highly competitive, unregulated character of the labour market. Let us consider these factors in turn.

#### (i) *Workers with Non-Market Access to the Means of Consumption*

The Regulationists' paradoxical notion of a phase of fully established capitalism in which labour-power still retains possession of, or non-market access to, the means of subsistence is, it must be said, especially puzzling, and, at the very least, needs much further elaboration. First, from a purely empirical point of view, there is no evidence that a significant proportion of farmers, let alone industrial workers, had direct non-market access to the means of subsistence in the capitalist United States, outside the South, during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> We shall return to this point below. Moreover, even if this idea had greater purchase historically, its theoretical justification, and status within Regulation Theory, would remain extremely unclear. Aglietta rightly argues that the creation and expansion of the wage-earning class takes place through 'a double structural change: [1] a separation between labour-power and means of production, which are combined solely in the labour process under the authority of capital, and . . . [2] the separation of labour-power from all its conditions

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<sup>24</sup> It is extremely difficult to understand how Aglietta can contend that 'A long historical process which began at the start of the 20th century has seen the penetration of capitalist production into the internal organization of towns, and into the production of means of individual consumption for the broad masses of workers' (emphasis added). *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 79.

of existence' (subsistence/consumption). Yet, from this premiss he concludes that 'there is no reason why the two components of this dual structural change should occur together', and that there are good grounds for expecting capitalist development initially to take place by way of [1] without the occurrence of [2], so that labour retains non-market access to its means of subsistence.<sup>25</sup> This is mystifying indeed.

Most obviously, the very fact of proletarianization would seem to imply a process by which the direct producers have been, or are being, separated from the means of subsistence. If [2], the process of depriving the direct producers of their subsistence land and tools, has not taken place, how can [1], the process of their subjection as wage-labour to the domination of capital within the labour process, be made to occur? It is only workers' lack of means of subsistence, and their consequent need to buy on the market, which compels them to sell their labour-power and submit to the exploitation of capital. On the other hand, if workers have been made subject to the authority of capital in the labour process, it would, under normal conditions, seem difficult for them just in practical terms to secure their means of consumption from agricultural households and plots in rural communities.

Suppose one admits, for the sake of argument, a workforce which subjects itself to the capitalist manufacturing labour process yet cannot constitute a mass market because of its direct non-market access to the means of subsistence. How, under these conditions, could there exist an adequate basis for ongoing capital accumulation? One would have the very odd economy in which capitalists produce machines for other capitalists with little or no final outlet in consumer goods—an economy composed entirely of Department I, in which capitalists are figuratively eating one another's machines. This seems to be something like the economy that Aglietta and the Regulationists posit within the historical-institutional framework of competitive regulation. But it seems at best a logically conceivable construct with little practical applicability to cases where capitalism has established itself.

Aglietta and the Regulationists may have in mind neither fully capitalist cases, nor situations in which producers retain full possession of the means of subsistence. They *may* rather be referring to situations in which peasants have partially lost their land and tools and are thus obliged to do some work for a wage, but have not yet become fully dependent upon capital. (It must be said that it is far from certain that this is what they have in mind, for they refer to a situation where labour is subject to the authority of capital in the labour process, and in Aglietta's exemplary case of the United States the countryside was primarily composed of neither peasants nor wage-labourers, but owner-operator farmer capitalists.) One can thus conceptualize and refer to a multitude of cases, historically and in the present, where producers, namely peasants—in consequence of population growth and the subdivision of holdings, the growth of taxation, or other such processes—found themselves with insufficient land and tools for

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 80–81



subsistence and were thus obliged to sell some of their labour-power on the market to merchant manufacturers to make ends meet.

In such cases, it is quite reasonable to expect that the path of capital accumulation might be constricted indeed. Capitalists would normally find it extremely difficult to organize labour under their own rule within the factory—to bring about the real as opposed to the merely formal subjection of labour to capital. They would likely be obliged to organize production on the basis of the household, that is, putting out. Indeed, capitalists would prefer this form, if the relatively low wages for peasant manufacturing workers in comparison with urban proletarians offset the losses that would accrue from the relatively low industrial productivity of peasant households in comparison with factory production. The upshot would certainly be a strong tendency to merely extensive accumulation.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, in line with the Regulationist emphasis, one could surely expect severe restrictions on the home market where manufacturing was organized on the basis of semi-proletarianized peasants: with producers directly producing a significant part of their subsistence bundle, they would offer only limited demand.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to see how reference to mechanisms of this sort fits in with, or supports, the Regulationist project of showing that emergent networks of capitalist institutions (modes of regulation) were responsible for historically varying modes of capitalist development. For the sources of the posited restriction on accumulation are not historically specific *capitalist institutions*, representing a variation upon capitalist social-property relations; they are instead precapitalist social-property relations and the possibilities and limits that these impose upon the direct peasant producers. By the same token, since such precapitalist social-property systems cannot simply be assumed to frame early capitalist development—they may or may not exist—in what meaningful sense can they be thought to make for an integral phase or mode of development in the evolution of capitalism?

(ii) *An Oversupply of Labour from the Precapitalist Countryside*

The Regulationists point to immigration from non-capitalist regions, both internal and external, as a further element of the competitive mode of regulation that gave rise to limited mass consumption. But this would appear to raise problems similar to those we have just been discussing. No doubt, manufacturing capitalism has often initially developed within, and secured its labour force from, precapitalist agrarian societies or such societies in transition to capitalism. No doubt, *in so far as* the rise of manufacturing capitalism is accompanied by processes of so-called primitive accumulation leading to the expulsion of agriculturalists from the land, or takes place within an environment in which widespread rural impoverishment allows for the

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<sup>26</sup> Neither Aglietta in particular, nor the Regulationists in general, offer any indication that they are referring to this sort of organization of production as underlying extensive accumulation. Given their focus on the United States and on the subjection of labour to capital within the labour process, they seem to have in mind factory labour that remains partially in possession of, or merged with, the means of subsistence.

easy attraction of agricultural labour to industry, the growth of the supply of labour will exert a downward pressure on wages. But on what basis can the Regulationists simply take it for granted that such conditions centrally define and determine a first capitalist mode of development marked by extensive accumulation, with its restricted wages and mass consumption, when these conditions are both external to the institutions of capitalism itself (though not of course to the process of development) and historically contingent upon socio-economic arrangements in the countryside at the time of industrialization?

It remains, further, an open question, even where processes of so-called primitive accumulation are separating an agrarian population from the means of production and subsistence, whether and to what degree it will actually be available for manufacturing. Agricultural sectors based on intensive forms of husbandry have, in some cases, proved a potent competitor for labour. And agrarian capitalism has, in certain critical instances, developed without—or with only the very slow—separation of the agrarian producers from the means of production, that is, on the basis of owner-operator commercial farmers. In such instances, the rise of capitalist agriculture may bring about not a plethora but a paucity of labour, pressure for high rather than low wages in manufacturing. That this is not merely a conceptual possibility is, of course, evident from Aglietta's exemplary case of the United States.

Precapitalist agrarian structures and their dissolution can, of course, in certain circumstances, supply vast pools of labour that exert downward pressure on wages. But to assert this, it would seem, is to do no more than identify one historical possibility, rather than to supply the premiss for the initial phase, or mode of development, posited in the Regulationist schema. Equally to the point, the mechanism that is here invoked to account for the restriction of capitalist growth to extensive accumulation is located, in decisive respects, outside the confines of the capitalist mode of production *per se*. It is thus not at all clear how it meshes with—or exemplifies—the Regulationist project of demonstrating the way in which historically specific regimes of capital accumulation need to be understood in terms of historically specific networks of properly capitalist institutions.

### *(iii) An Unregulated Labour Market*

While the unorganized, unregulated labour market of the competitive mode of regulation—made that much less controllable by the working class in consequence of massive immigration—will tend greatly to facilitate capitalist exploitation of wage labour, it cannot simply be assumed to cancel out—any more than can the existence of a large supply of labour—the powerful mechanisms for pushing up working-class consumption that are built into the normal processes of competition and capitalist accumulation over the medium term. Indeed, it has seemed a commonplace that relatively extended or long waves of capital accumulation—such as were encompassed by the Regulationists' first mode of development—create inexorable upward pressures on both aggregate consumption and the real wage, pressures which, for some reason, the Regulationists, in their discussion of extensive

accumulation, basically ignore. Aggregate consumption increases simply because the investment of surpluses entails the employment of additional waged workers.<sup>27</sup> The level of wages tends to rise in consequence of rising demand for labour. Moreover, more efficient capitalist producers are obliged to bid up wages in order to compete with other firms for the additional workers they need to expand their share of the market.<sup>28</sup> It was precisely the pressures of attracting, keeping and disciplining a fast-growing labour force for his low-cost automobiles that led Henry Ford to offer his famous \$5-per-day wage.

Since these mechanisms could be just as powerful in the earliest phases of capital accumulation as later on—and tend to operate even in highly repressive political environments—there seems little justification for positing, without much further argument, that their effects were offset by intra-working-class competition and immigration throughout the first mode of development. What appears to be at issue is the Regulationists' elevation of a counter-tendency to an absolute, determining feature of a whole epoch of economic history.

### From Restricted Mass Consumption to Limited Mass Production?

Finally, even if it were granted that the institutions defining competitive regulation and extensive accumulation depressed aggregate working-class demand, it would still be necessary to challenge the further notion—perhaps the conceptual linchpin of the Regulationists' general schema of stages in which historically specific modes of consumption play a defining role—that the rise of mass production required, or was prevented in the absence of, the autonomous rise of mass consumption. This proposition seems to depend on the assumption that accumulation was taking place primarily through the methods of extending absolute surplus-value, and that workers were deriving their subsistence outside the sphere of commodity production. More directly, however, it appears to derive from Aglietta's conception of capital accumulation as tending to take place through the 'uneven development of Department I'. In his view, technical change generally arises in Department I producing means of production and calls forth increased investment in that Department by capitalists anxious to profit from technological rents. Nevertheless, because workers' consumption is restricted under competitive regulation and extensive accumulation, and because few links of exchange tie Department I to Department II producing the means of consumption, the increase and cheapening of the output of Department I that results from added investment in the new technique are prevented from calling forth a compensatory expansion of Department II. The outcome is a tendency to overproduction leading to a sharp fall in prices and a disruption of accumulation in Department I.

There are a number of problems with this argument. Leaving aside

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<sup>27</sup> 'Accumulation of capital is . . . multiplication of the proletariat'. Marx, *Capital* Volume I, p. 764.

<sup>28</sup> Aglietta himself calls attention to just such a mechanism, although he would likely deny its applicability to the Regulationists' first mode of development. *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 305

the limiting, and historically almost inconceivable, case of a capitalism in which consumer goods are not at all commoditized—so that Department II does not effectively exist—it is difficult to see why a significant part of the innovative activity taking place in Department I will not result, almost inevitably, in capital goods aimed for use in Department II. That is, the mere fact that a technical change may formally originate in Department I—say, with a new tool produced in a machine shop—does not at all mean that its motivation did not come from, or that its effects were not most profoundly felt in, Department II. Capitalists are, as a rule, obliged to adopt any technique that will reduce the cost of production for a commodity; this is no less true of capitalists in Department II than in Department I; cheaper capital goods that originate in Department I will thus be broadly adopted by Department II for the production of consumer goods; the reduced price will increase the size of the population able to buy the commodity, so that unless employment and/or nominal wages actually fall, the market for this good will inevitably grow as a result of its cheapness. The Regulationists go to rather extreme lengths to ignore (or even to deny) this fundamental tendency.<sup>29</sup> Yet it appears obvious that, since the origins of capitalism, the fundamental way in which products have become mass-consumption commodities has been as a result of changed conditions of supply leading to a reduction in price;<sup>30</sup> and that changes in the conditions of consumer-goods supply have regularly originated with new machines produced in Department I.<sup>31</sup> It has therefore seemed an elementary empirical generalization that, for the history of capitalism, the rise of mass production does not require, but rather issues in, mass consumption—that the latter has depended upon the former, even though, in some important ways, facilitating it.

### 3. Extensive Accumulation, Competitive Regulation and US Economic History

The criticisms in the previous sections, if sustainable, would appear to cast grave doubt upon the whole Regulationist account of the first 'mode of development'. To the extent that the Regulationists have adduced mechanisms that could, in theory, constitute fetters on

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Aglietta's odd contention that in the late-nineteenth-century US, 'The downturn in agricultural prices was . . . decisive in bringing about a fall in wages.' *Ibid.*, pp. 78–9.

<sup>30</sup> Take, for example, tobacco, which, as a result of the rise of American plantation production, saw its price fall by a factor of six or more in the two decades between 1620 and 1640; or spun cotton, which as a result of the technical advances initiating the Industrial Revolution, saw its price fall by a factor of eight between 1779 and 1812; or the Ford Model T automobile, which, as a result of the introduction of Henry Ford's new production system, saw its price reduced by 60 per cent in the seven years between 1909 and 1916. R.R. Menard, 'A Note on Chesapeake Tobacco Prices, 1618–1660', *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXXIV, 1976, pp. 404–6; S.D. Chapman, *The Cotton Industry in the Industrial Revolution*, London 1972, p. 44; A. Nevins, *Ford: the Times, the Mass, the Company*, New York 1954; D.A. Hounshell, *From the American System to Mass Production 1800–1932*, Baltimore 1984.

<sup>31</sup> Take, for example, the congeries of new machines for spinning and weaving cotton textiles in the English industrial revolution, or the new machines for harvesting in the American agricultural revolution.

production that might yield a pattern of extensive accumulation, these rely on the effects of peasant-dominated precapitalist social-property relations. To the extent that they have referred to mechanisms arising from properly capitalist institutional forms to account for extensive accumulation, they have failed to explain why these should be expected to outweigh the effects of processes built into the functioning of capitalist social property relations *per se*. The upshot is that the Regulationists have given us no reason why the capitalist institutions they define as constituting the competitive mode of regulation should actually issue in anything but intensive accumulation.

We now need to look more closely at the historical case which Aglietta and other Regulationists take to be emblematic of a regime of extensive accumulation governed by the competitive mode of regulation: namely, the US economy in the second half of the nineteenth century. For ultimately it is upon its capacity to grasp the actual economic history of capitalism that the usefulness of their conceptualization will depend.

### Relative Surplus Value and the Growth of Working-Class Demand

The first question to be asked is whether the US economy that the Regulationists portray—one structured by craft control, a multitude of competing firms and a competitive labour market—discouraged the allocation of funds to the high-risk investments in fixed capital required for innovation and the lowest-cost production. There seems little evidence that such investment was discouraged or that productivity growth was thus restricted.

According to Maddison, gross fixed non-residential investment as a proportion of GNP in the US fluctuated between 12 per cent and 15 per cent in the years from 1871 to 1914, while the average annual rate of growth of non-residential fixed capital stock in the same period was 4.1 per cent. These are impressive figures by any standard, and should be compared, respectively, with the 6 per cent and 1.4 per cent achieved in the same period by the United Kingdom, an economy that must certainly have been experiencing intensive and not extensive accumulation.<sup>32</sup>

Kendrick provides the following tabulation for the growth of manufacturing productivity in the US between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I:

Table I.

Average annual growth of output per unit of labour input in US manufacturing, 1869–1914 (%)

1869–1879	1.05
1879–1889	2.66
1889–1899	1.53
1899–1909	1.22
1909–1914	2.43

Sources: J.W. Kendrick, *Productivity Trends in the United States*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Princeton 1961, p. 465.

<sup>32</sup> A. Maddison, *Phases of Capitalist Development*, Oxford 1982, pp. 40, 100.

Gallman offers data to similar effect which are somewhat cruder but go further back in time:

Table II.

Decennial growth in commodity production per gainfully employed worker, 1840-1909 (%)

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1840-1849	10
1850-1859	23
1860-1869	2
1870-1879	22
1880-1889	27
1890-1899	15
1900-1909	24

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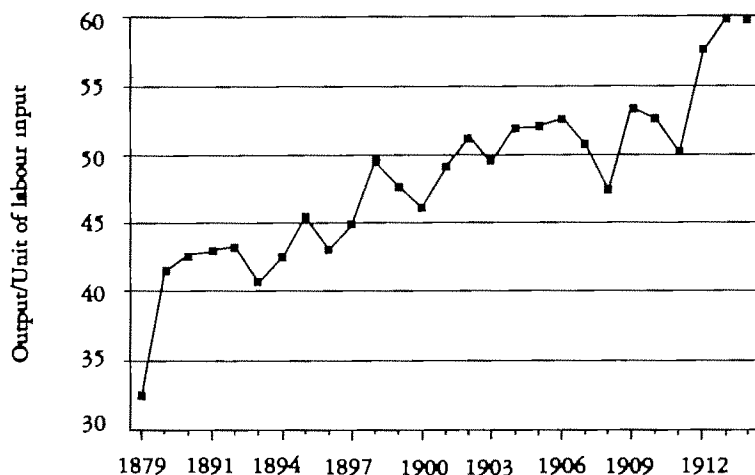
Source: R.E. Gallman, 'Commodity Output, 1839-1899: The United States', in *Trends in the American Economy in the Nineteenth Century*, Studies in Income and Wealth, vol. 24, National Bureau of Economic Research, Princeton 1960, pp. 16, 24.

The rate of growth of labour productivity in the period before World War I seems to have been somewhat lower than that achieved in the post-World War II boom. (See Table V below, p. 95.) Nevertheless, it can hardly be said that productivity stagnated; nor can one possibly account for the steady growth of productivity over such an extended period in terms of the intensification of labour. Equally important, we can find no long-term trend toward the slowing down of productivity growth at any point in the period between 1850 and the First World War, such as one would expect if development had been taking place, after a certain point, on the basis of an effectively given, or only very slowly growing, level of development of the productive forces. Such a trend is implied by Boyer's idea, noted above, of a 'semi-stagnation of productivity' at the end of the phase of extended accumulation, but this idea has no empirical counterpart in US economic development before World War I.

Thus, the actual pattern of long-term productivity growth in this period clearly contradicts the Regulationist contention that the foundations of economic growth were largely confined to the methods of increasing absolute surplus-value. In reality, the increase of relative surplus-value leading to intensive accumulation was a central and defining aspect of the development process in this epoch, as should not be surprising given the predominance in the post-bellum United States of a rather pure form of capitalist social-property relations.

The fact that the growth of labour productivity was a characteristic feature of economic development is itself evidence that the economy offered ample potential for the growth of real wages. Indeed, productivity growth created a tendency toward—although it could not completely determine—rising real wages, for the obvious reason that it meant lower-cost production and, under competitive conditions, all else equal, downward pressures on the prices of commodities that entered into workers' subsistence bundle. Between 1864 and 1880, the

Figure I.  
Productivity in manufacturing, 1879-1914



Source: US Department of Labor, *Handbook of Labor Statistics* 1973, Washington D.C. 1973.

consumer price index fell from 180 to 110, although in so doing, it reached levels no lower than had obtained in the mid 1850s. From 1880 to 1900, the price level fell significantly further, from 110 to 95.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in order to secure quite significant increases in their real wages, workers had only to prevent their nominal wages from falling as fast as commodity prices.

In fact, after stagnating during the depression of the 1870s, real wages grew by about 75 per cent between 1880 and 1914.<sup>34</sup> It is true that, in the period immediately prior to World War I, the flood tide of immigration did result in keeping the growth of real wages somewhat below the growth of labour productivity, but even that is hardly the same as saying that real wages stagnated. As Rees concludes, hourly wages in manufacturing grew by an annual average of 1.3 per cent between 1889 and 1913, as compared with an average increase of 2.1 per cent in output per production-worker manhour in the same period. (It should be recalled in passing that 1.3 per cent p.a. was also the average increase in this period for output per weighted unit of labour and capital input combined.<sup>35</sup>) Moreover, during the period from 1880 to 1914 as a whole, while the real wage was growing by 75 per cent, the labour productivity index in manufacturing was growing only slightly faster, by 83 per cent.<sup>36</sup> If we begin the period at the end of the Civil War, then wages probably actually rose as a share of the

<sup>33</sup> E.B. Hoover, 'Retail Prices After 1850', in *Trends in the American Economy in the Nineteenth Century*, Studies in Income and Wealth, National Bureau of Economic Research, volume 24, Princeton 1960, esp. pp. 142-3, 153, 162.

<sup>34</sup> S. Lebergott, *Manpower in Economic Growth: The American Record since 1800*, New York 1964, p. 163; also A. Rees, *Real Wages in Manufacturing 1890-1914*, National Bureau of Economic Research, New York 1961.

<sup>35</sup> Rees, *Real Wages*, pp. 123-7.

<sup>36</sup> J.W. Kendrick, *Productivity Trends in the United States*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Princeton 1961, p. 465; Lebergott, *Manpower in Economic Growth*, p. 163.

total product.<sup>37</sup> Reliable data on the share of consumption (versus investment) in GNP are available only from 1890, but between then and the outbreak of World War I it maintained a level equal to or higher than at any date after 1950. (See Figure VI below, p. 95.)

### US Economic Growth, 1850–1914: Classical Capitalist Development

The fact is, then, that the pattern of US economic growth in the period from roughly 1850 to 1914 could hardly have diverged more decisively from the Regulationists' first mode of development, in which growth primarily rests upon increased exploitation of labour, sharply restricted productivity increases, and geographical expansion of the system. No doubt the US capitalist economy, after the Civil War, did very significantly intensify the exploitation of labour and did dramatically extend its geographical reach. Nevertheless, economic development followed what might be termed a classically capitalist path of development, conforming to what the Regulationists misleadingly call intensive accumulation, not extensive accumulation. Powered by competition among many firms, it achieved dramatic increases in mechanization leading to rising productivity, rising real wages, and the explosive expansion of the most dynamic home market in the world at that time. This is evident not only in the aggregate figures for manufacturing productivity and wages already noted, but also in a more disaggregated view of the basic contours and trends in the US economy.

At the core of growth was an agricultural revolution. Starting in the middle of the century, and aided by the completion in 1869 of the transcontinental railroad, agriculture underwent a spectacular process of modernization. The social basis, as Aglietta emphasizes, was provided by owner-operator family farmers, not of course peasants. Their economic activities, so pivotal for capital accumulation throughout the nineteenth century, explode almost every one of the Regulationists' attempts to define competitive regulation and extensive accumulation. Far from being subject to the capitalist labour process in their production but independent from the market in their consumption—the labour force envisioned in the Regulationists' ideal-typical first mode of development—these agricultural producers still retained significant means of production and control of the labour process but were, from the 1820s or so, by and large market-dependent for their means of subsistence. The fact that even most farmers, not to mention manufacturing workers, bought their means of consumption on the market makes a mockery of the Regulationists' idea that in their first period of development in the United States workers derived their subsistence from outside the sphere of capitalist commodity production. Precisely because of their market dependence, US farmers as individuals had little choice but to purchase more advanced machinery from the capital-goods sector, so as to cut costs and compete on their output markets. This in itself calls sharply into question the Regulationist view of an economy unable to accumulate by the methods of increasing relative surplus-value or to develop mass

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<sup>37</sup> E.C. Budd, 'Factor Shares, 1850–1910', in *Trends in the American Economy in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 373; see Table IV below, p. 83.



production through capital investment in Department II, for food production is of course the consumer-goods sector *par excellence*.

Furthermore, the central role of owner-operator family farmers, who largely held their place in the economy by producing at the socially necessary rate, meant that agriculture could only with difficulty supply a sufficient labour force for the rise of manufacture. The result was a long-term tendency not to depress wages but, in connection with other factors, to support wages at the world's highest levels. The growth of agricultural productivity thus combined with the growth of wages to boost the working class's discretionary purchasing power and thereby working-class demand for a whole range of non-food consumer goods. At the same time, demand from the agricultural sector stoked the machine-tool branch directly and the capital-goods sector more generally, while farmers' growing income helped buttress the demand for household implements and the market in consumer goods as a whole. Finally, high wages stimulated cost-cutting technical change—and hence the demand for capital goods—by encouraging the substitution of relatively cheap capital for relatively expensive labour in production.<sup>38</sup>

The dynamic growth of agricultural production and agricultural productivity stimulated, and was made possible by, the growth of mechanization, which was itself dependent upon the expansion and transformation, upstream, of the machine-tool industry. Output per worker in agriculture tripled between 1840 and 1911, with 60 per cent of the increase due to mechanization and 70 per cent of that attributable to two epoch-making inventions—the reaper and the thresher. Demand for agricultural implements was, in turn, heavily responsible for the impressive growth and transformation of the iron and steel industry.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, the growth of agricultural output provided the materials, downstream, for a whole series of modern mechanized industries in food processing—milling of flour, meat-packing, distilling, and the like. Aglietta notes the significance of these industries, but quite wrongly postdates their appearance to the 1890s. In fact, they had begun to work their powerful transformative effects by the Civil War, if not earlier.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For this and the following paragraph, see the important studies by C. Post: 'The American Road to Capitalism', *NLR* 133, May-June 1982, pp. 38–44; 'Civil War and Reconstruction in the U.S.: Primitive Accumulation and the Bourgeois Revolution (1844–1877)', *Working Papers of the International Institute for Research and Education*, no. 5, Amsterdam 1989, pp. 5–8. Our discussion in this section has also benefited a great deal from B. Page and R. Walker, 'From Settlement to Fordism: The Agro-Industrial Revolution in the American Midwest', which offers a powerful interpretation of US economic development in the nineteenth century. We wish to thank the authors for allowing us to read this essay in advance of publication. On the question of the farmers' market dependence for their means of production and means of subsistence, see R.M. Tryon, *Household Manufacturers in the United States, 1640–1860*, Chicago 1917, esp. chs. vii and viii.

<sup>39</sup> N. Rosenberg, *Technology and American Economic Growth*, New York 1972, pp. 25–6.

<sup>40</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 90. An especially illuminating discussion of these industries and their pivotal role in the developing economy can be found in Page and Walker, 'From Settlement to Fordism'; see also Davis's insightful comments in ' "Fordism" in Crisis', p. 219.

The spectacular expansion and transformation of the US productive economy ultimately rested upon a distinctive capital-goods sector, with a modern core producing highly specialized dedicated machines. Perhaps the characteristic feature of the new technology was the introduction of interchangeable parts, which were themselves dependent upon a new capacity for precision and standardized production. Essential to the process was of course the substitution of machines for labour. Machines made possible more effective production and higher-quality output. They also allowed for the replacement of expensive craft labour with much cheaper semi-skilled labour at each of the multiple stages through which a good was manufactured—and most especially in what had been the highly skilled and time-consuming task of fitting together all of the component parts into the finished product. The new machine-factory thus centrally involved the replacement of 'fitting' (and fitters) with 'assembly' (and assemblers).<sup>41</sup>

What enabled the new machine-tool sector to impart such a powerful stimulus to the development of US industry was its capacity to solve a series of roughly similar technical problems that had arisen in a wide range of consumer-goods and other manufacturing industries. Techniques initially devised to solve production problems in such industries as textiles and gun-making were thus applied, over time, in clocks and watches, sewing-machines, agricultural implements, locomotives, locks, hardware, typewriters, bicycles and, ultimately, automobiles. Even by 1851, foreign observers had become aware of the rise toward world leadership of US industry and clearly saw that the key to its immanent superiority was the use of machines dedicated to extremely specific tasks and constructed in highly specialized firms. By the 1860s, manufacturers had already begun to organize their factories so as to make possible the rational progression of semi-finished products from station to station throughout the shop and, in meatpacking and grain elevators, to devise mechanisms for continuously moving these commodities between work stations—the earliest assembly lines.<sup>42</sup>

It is hard to overemphasize the centrality of the autonomous growth of machine-based mass production for the growth of mass consumption, or the centrality of the growth of mass consumption for US economic development, in the nineteenth century. In 1860 the top ten sectors of the US economy, listed in order of size, were as follows:

*By Value Added:* (1) cotton goods; (2) lumber; (3) boots and shoes; (4) flour and meal; (5) men's clothing; (6) iron; (7) machinery; (8) woollen goods; (9) leather; (10) liquor

*By Number Employed:* (1) boots and shoes; (2) cotton; (3) men's clothing; (4) lumber; (5) iron; (6) machinery; (7) woollens; (8) flour and meal; (9) leather; (10) liquor

(Source: D.C. North, *Growth and Welfare in the American Past*, 2nd edition, Englewood Cliffs 1974, p. 80.)

<sup>41</sup> Rosenberg, *Technology and American Economic Growth*, pp. 88–95. As Henry Ford observed in his article on 'Mass Production', which appeared in the twenty-second edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: 'In mass production there are no fitters' (quoted in Rosenberg, p. 95)

<sup>42</sup> For the previous paragraph, see Rosenberg, *Technology and American Economic Growth*, pp. 90–91, 95–112. Cf. D. Nelson, *Managers and Workers. Origins of the New Factory System*, Madison 1973, p. 19

It may thus be seen that the greatest part of US manufacturing—by value added and by employment—was devoted to production directly for popular consumption. Since so much of iron and machinery production was to meet the demand of the agricultural sector, as well as the mechanized consumer-goods industries, for tools, it seems reasonable to conclude—as many commentators have done—that US development even by the time of the Civil War was being heavily underwritten by the domestic market, by *mass consumption*.<sup>43</sup>

It is easy to demonstrate the manner and degree in which mass consumption was predicated on *mass production*. Of the above ten leading industries, at least eight—boots and shoes, cottons and woollens, men's clothing, machinery, iron and steel, flour and meal, and distilling—had already experienced, or were fully in the process of experiencing, factory mechanization by the time of the Civil War or immediately after.<sup>44</sup> As Carroll D. Wright pointed out in the introduction to the census of manufactures for 1880:<sup>45</sup>

Of the nearly three millions of people employed in the mechanical industries of this country at least four fifths are working under the factory system. Some of the other remarkable instances of the applications of the system [besides those in textiles] are to be found in the manufacture of boots and shoes, of watches, musical instruments, clothing, agricultural instruments, metal goods generally, fire arms, carriages and wagons, wooden goods, rubber goods, and even the slaughtering of hogs. Most of these industries have been brought under the factory system in the past thirty years.

And Chandler adds: 'In the refinery and distilling and furnace and foundry industries the proportion of workers employed in comparable industrial establishments was probably even higher.'<sup>46</sup> In sum: the capital-goods sector grew up in large part to serve, and to make technically possible, mass production in consumer-goods industries. Once again, this seems flatly to contradict the contention of Aglietta and the Regulationists that the paucity of links—technical and exchange—between Department I and Department II was a defining characteristic of the economy that directly restricted its path of accumulation. On the contrary, the particular genius of the US economy of the second half of the nineteenth century was the capacity of its capital-goods (mainly machine-tool) makers to invent and bring into play more effective means of production in direct response to the technical needs of firms, in particular consumer-goods industries. Driven by competition, capitalist producers dramatically increased fixed capital investments, thereby making possible major increases in aggregate productivity—in other words, accumulation via the methods

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<sup>43</sup> Hounshell, *From the American System*, pp. 153–88.

<sup>44</sup> B. Hazard, 'The Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry Before 1875', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, xxvii, 1913, pp. 236–62; A. Chandler, 'The Coming of Big Business', in A. Chandler, S. Bruchey and L. Galambos, eds., *The Changing Economic Order*, New York 1968; A. Chandler, *The Visible Hand. The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, Cambridge, Mass. 1977, pp. 57–8, 245–72; Hounshell, *From the American System*, pp. 125–52.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Chandler, *Visible Hand*, p. 246.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

of extending relative surplus-value. At the same time, lower prices resulting from productivity increases combined with workers' bargaining power to allow significant increases in real wages and workers' consumption and an impressively growing home market.

This general picture is confirmed by indices of comparative performance, which show that between the Civil War and World War I, US manufacturing challenged and even surpassed the British industrial hegemon. Indeed, well before the end of this era, the US manufacturing economy secured a tremendous new source of dynamism through the application of science to technology. This 'second industrial revolution' was not just a question of the rise of the automobile, itself the culmination of the growth of machinofacture based on the powerful machine-tool sector. It also brought entirely new or vastly transformed industries, in which continuous-process production drew upon scientific advances—namely, chemicals, petroleum, petrochemicals, steel, aluminium, cement, and so forth.<sup>47</sup>

Comparative economic data presented by Aglietta himself further undermine the idea that the pattern of development theoretically structured by competitive regulation and extensive accumulation held for the US in the latter part of the nineteenth century, or that the rise of mass consumption had to await the institutional transformations of the 'Fordist' epoch.

Table III.

Comparison of average indices, 1890–99, assessed in English money and related to the same indices as established for England.

	Hourly real wages	Value added per production worker	Real social wage cost
England	1.00	1.00	1.00
Germany	0.59	0.66	0.90
United States	1.08	1.57	0.68

Source: Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 92

By the end of the century, then, the US economy had succeeded in raising its labour productivity to a level more than one-and-a-half times that of England (and some two-and-a-half times that of Germany), and on that basis had secured unit labour costs sharply lower than those of its major competitors despite paying measurably higher wages.<sup>48</sup> As we shall see, in most of the main indices of economic development—rate of growth of GDP per capita, proportion of GNP devoted to fixed (non-residential) investment, rate of growth

<sup>47</sup> Rosenberg, *Technology and American Economic Growth*, pp. 116–17ff.

<sup>48</sup> The same point is made explicitly by Mike Davis, who observes that Aglietta's own data 'show the *differentialia specifica* of the United States as the economy most integrally dependent upon the production of relative surplus-value'. 'Fordism in Crisis', pp. 256–7.

of investment in fixed capital per man-hour, and the like—the dynamism of the US economy between 1870 and 1914 was quite comparable to what it would be during the great boom of 1950 to 1973.<sup>49</sup>

We can therefore conclude that the Regulation School's notion of extensive accumulation governed by competitive regulation entirely misconceptualizes a historical process of development, and that the period in question actually seems to have been distinguished by a rather spectacular degree of dependence on accumulation by way of the methods of relative surplus-value and the growth of mass consumption—to have amounted, in fact, to *intensive* accumulation. More to the point, because intensive accumulation was already taking place on institutional foundations that the Regulationists call the competitive mode of regulation, their overarching interpretative schema of institutionally founded historical phases of capital accumulation is called fundamentally into question. In this schema, a transition from extensive to intensive accumulation is supposed to constitute a pivotal moment: the rise of intensive accumulation is prevented, contradicted and undermined by the competitive mode of regulation; the establishment of intensive accumulation is predicated upon an at least partial transformation of competitive regulation; the contradiction between intensive accumulation and still partially competitive regulation lies behind the interwar crisis; and the emergence of a new mode of development—in which intensive accumulation is governed by a newly installed monopolistic or Fordist mode of regulation—is explained in large part as a resolution of that contradiction. If, however, the initial phase of extensive accumulation never existed in the relevant time period, what is left of the supposed transition to intensive accumulation? If intensive accumulation grew up precisely *on the basis of* the institutions of competitive regulation, what remains of the supposed contradiction between competitive regulation and intensive accumulation, of the fettering of the latter by the former? If there was no real contradiction between intensive accumulation and still partially competitive regulation—since competitive relations among capitalists and on the labour market could actually promote the dual growth of production and consumption and of output and demand that made possible successful intensive accumulation—how can that contradiction lie behind the interwar crisis? If the interwar crisis was not the result of the aforementioned contradiction, how can the rise of institutions guaranteeing the Fordist consumption norm be said to have accounted for the transcendence of the interwar crisis in the postwar boom?

### III Mode of Development Two: Intensive Accumulation But Still Competitive Regulation

The mode of development defined by competitive regulation and extensive accumulation gave way, in the Regulationist schema, to a new mode of development defined by a still essentially competitive mode of regulation guiding a regime of intensive accumulation. The

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<sup>49</sup> See Table V below, p. 95.

changed regime of accumulation expressed the supersession of craft production by mass production, the turn to massive investment in fixed capital embodying major advances in technique with returns expected over the long term, and a qualitative break to a new level of productivity growth—most generally, a process of capital accumulation founded predominantly on the extraction of relative surplus-value. The emergence of these new economic regularities, it is argued, was made possible by significant institutional changes. New forms of regulation of the market expressed a higher degree of inter-capitalist organization, and within the manufacturing enterprise an extended process of class struggle led to a break beyond craft control. Nevertheless, the mode of regulation remained in the last analysis competitive because the fundamental capital-labour wage relation was still essentially unregulated and marked by untrammelled competition, with the consequence that there was no transformation in the mode of working-class consumption or the economy's capacity to provide demand for the output of Department I.

### 1. Mass Production without Mass Consumption

The regime of intensive accumulation was, most immediately and directly, a function of the rise of Scientific Management, through which capitalist corporations succeeded, in the face of workers' resistance, in exerting increasingly systematic control over the labour process so as to achieve technical innovation. Most generally, this involved so-called Taylorist methods of rationalization: an acceleration of the mechanical processes of task completion (that is, an intensification of labour facilitated by time-and-motion studies); the filling up of gaps in the working day that resulted either from lack of coordination among machine functions or from work breaks; and, especially, the integration of mechanized segments of the labour process that had previously been separated (and often subject to significant control by the workers themselves). Taylorism culminated in and was transcended by the Fordist integration of the labour process, involving the introduction of conveyors and handling devices that assured the movement of materials and their arrival at the appropriate machine tools. The *coup de grâce* was the automatic assembly line, which rigorously fixed workers to jobs determined by the configuration of the machine system and deprived them of all control over their work rhythm and job autonomy. The labour process was thus 'converted from a dense network of relationships between jobs, with intermediate products passing back and forth [...] into a straightforward linear flow of material under transformation.'<sup>30</sup>

The establishment of the Taylorist-Fordist labour process was assisted by a transition in the mode of regulation of capital-capital relations away from full competition in the direction of oligopoly. A qualitative increase in the concentration of capital, the rise of finance-dominated trusts, and the emergence of the modern corporation allowed for greater inter-capitalist control of competition, markets and the

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<sup>30</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, pp. 113–17 (quotation p. 117); Boyer, 'Technical Change', pp. 82–3; Davis, 'Crisis of "Fordism"', pp. 222–3

investment environment more generally. The resulting reduction in the level of risk, combined with the destruction of craft control of the labour process, facilitated a qualitative leap in fixed capital investment embodying technical advance, especially from the end of World War I.<sup>51</sup>

Taken together, the foregoing processes brought about the rise of a new mode of development in which accumulation by the methods of increasing relative surplus-value came to predominate and the *potential* first emerged for regularized mass consumption. Aglietta dates the beginnings of this breakthrough in the United States from the end of the nineteenth century and its decisive establishment from the 1920s.

It is a central thesis of the Regulation School, however, that because the new regime of intensive accumulation was still guided by a competitive mode of regulation in terms of the capital-labour wage relationship, the newly-emergent mode of development was inherently unstable. The spectacular growth of mass production thus brought new problems because it continued to be associated with restricted mass consumption. As Aglietta explains, under extensive accumulation capitalism had 'implant[ed] itself for a long historical period without destroying traditional ways of life, indeed even benefiting from the reconstitution of labour-power by a non-capitalist environment in which it [was] still inserted.' Then came the rise of intensive accumulation.

The destruction of the traditional social environment is only accomplished by the development of heavy industry, which enforces the total uprooting that is characteristic of the wage relation: the separation of labour-power from all its conditions of existence. The mode of life of the wage-earning class then suffers a deep degradation. This degradation is the basis of the gigantic structural transformation that all the capitalist countries experienced from the end of the nineteenth century . . .<sup>52</sup>

The tendency to hold down workers' wages grew more acute, then, around the turn of the century in the United States. This was due not only to the producers' loss of access to non-commodity sources of reproduction and their (resultant) flooding onto the labour market, but also to the massive downward pressure on wages from the rising wave of immigration. Then, in the wake of World War I, in a series of great confrontations with capital, workers suffered a series of devastating defeats that opened the way for cuts in their living and working standards during the 1920s. Finally, especially during the 1920s, technical change further eroded their bargaining position by undermining the old craft-union structures.<sup>53</sup> As a result: '[T]he disproportion between expansion in Department II and accumulation in Department I rapidly increased, since the forces that were revolutionizing the labour process were also those reducing effective demand for

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<sup>51</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135. Cf. Boyer, 'Wage/Labour Relations, Growth, and Crisis', pp. 5-6.

commodities from Department II.<sup>34</sup> The general underlying structural contradiction of the mode of development based on intensive accumulation but governed by competitive regulation thus began suddenly to manifest itself during the late 1920s, and issued in the great crisis of the 1930s. Boyer sums up the problem as follows: '[M]ass production is technically possible, but cannot be sustained since the prevailing "regulation" strongly moderates real wage increases; at the same time as wage-earners become a dominant fraction of the total labour force. It turns out that such an intensive accumulation is highly contradictory (the profit rate is too high adequately to permit an adequate effective demand) and unstable.[...] Therefore this is not a viable mode of development in the long run.'<sup>35</sup>

What apparently allowed this mode of development to flower to the limited extent that it did was the continuing opportunities for the growth of Department I provided by the opening of the frontier. But as the possibilities for accumulation on the frontier were exhausted, and especially as the pace of technical change suddenly accelerated during the 1920s, economic growth took place on increasingly fragile foundations. For a brief period, growing consumer demand from the rising middle layer of managerial, sales and technical personnel—paid for out of the social surplus itself—endowed the economy with a new source of dynamism; but the underlying tendencies to the uneven development of Department I and underconsumption could not forever be postponed.

## 2. Was There a Structural Problem of Underconsumption?

At the core of the Theory of Regulation is the idea that the level and character of working-class consumption are: (a) in crucial respects institutionally conditioned; (b) untransformable through changes in technology and the labour process alone; and (c) critically determinative for the path of capital accumulation. The establishment of intensive accumulation on a stable basis therefore required institutions that would assure the Fordist norm of working-class consumption. Even so, it is possible that the Regulationists would deny that capitalism in general is subject to crises of underconsumption, arguing merely that the crisis of the 1920s needs to be understood in terms of historically developed tendencies associated with a quite specific path of development—the rise of intensive accumulation in association with a still competitive mode of regulation. The fact remains, however, that an underconsumptionist theory provides the basis for—and is indispensable to—not only their account of this crisis but also their institutional-historical theory of capitalist development in general.

This is evident, first of all, from the *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, the founding text of the Regulation School, which is centred upon a very

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<sup>34</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 94. 'Massive savings on Irving labour, combined with the crushing defeat of the workers' movement after the First World War, rapidly increased inequality of incomes'. Cf. Boyer, 'Technical Change', p. 83.

<sup>35</sup> Boyer, 'Technical Change', p. 82. Cf. Boyer, 'Wage/Labour Relations, Growth and Crisis', p. 4.



explicit—if not fully worked-out—traditional underconsumptionist thesis. More generally, underconsumptionism is the dominant theme within a Regulationist approach to crisis that views capitalism as developing along a sort of tightrope, with the Scylla of a rising organic composition/falling rate of profit crisis on one side and the Charybdis of a rising rate of profit/underconsumption crisis on the other. From this standpoint, technical mutations originating in Department I are at the core of capital accumulation. Thus, 'a deepening of the principle of mechanization [...] induces a rise in the organic composition of capital as the counterpart of the saving on labour-power. Relative surplus-value increases thanks to an ever more intensive renewal of the means of production. Department I consequently grows at an ever more rapid rate.' But this process involves a double danger.

On the one hand, if 'the transformation of the conditions of production takes place by a [...] rise in the organic composition of capital', unless 'wage costs fall more quickly than the proportion of constant capital in total exchange-value rises [...] then the total costs of production increase [profitability falls] and the rate of accumulation slows down.' This is, of course, the classical falling-rate-of-profit motif.

On the other hand, while it is true that 'if total costs of production [do] fall, the result is an increase in the general rate of profit and an acceleration of the rate of accumulation'; nonetheless, 'this process can be impaired by diverging forces'—notably, forces making for insufficient consuming power in society. Specifically: '[i] the internal development of Department I runs too far ahead, since the social demand for means of production must be ever greater to sustain a sufficient saving of labour-power to permit the fall in the costs of production to continue; [ii] the exchange-value of wages distributed undergoes a relative decline, whilst profits build up more and more, particularly in Department I.' The result is a crisis of underconsumption leading to a crisis of realization.

A moment is necessarily reached when the rate of profit in Department I increases relative to the capital advanced, by virtue of the accelerated development of this department, whereas accumulation in Department II is restrained by the restriction of the social demand for means of consumption. The proportion of income assigned to purchase the exchange-value of Department II grows far less quickly than the proportion of income assigned to purchase means of production [...]. There is then an inevitable difference between the rate of profit in Department I and that in Department II. The result is that Department II becomes unable to purchase sufficient means of production to match the rate of growth in Department I, since the distribution of income develops in a way that does not enable the formation of sufficient social demand for means of consumption. In these conditions, the constraint of full realization of exchange-value is transgressed. [...] an overproduction of means of production.<sup>36</sup>

In Aglietta's view, the underconsumptionist dynamic is an abiding problem of the capitalist mode of production, at the root not only of

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<sup>36</sup> For the foregoing quotations on this page, *Theory of Regulation*, pp. 285–6.

the interwar crisis but also of the crisis of Fordism that began in the mid-to-late sixties, although he also recognizes that the underlying historical conditions were very different. But even if their works had failed to contain so clear a statement, the underconsumptionist thesis would still form the theoretical foundation of the Regulationists' entire edifice. This is because the direct logical outcome of their argument is that a capitalism developing on the basis of relative surplus-value will experience crises of underconsumption in the absence of historically contingent counteracting tendencies—and, more specifically, in the absence of special institutional forms to maintain an adequate growth of workers' consumption. In other words, capitalism without the Fordist norm of working-class consumption suffers from underconsumption. As Boyer succinctly puts it, 'when wage formation is mainly competitive, a new industrial revolution leads to such a high profit rate that it cannot be sustained in the long run because of a lack of appropriate total demand.'<sup>77</sup>

The two main factors which the Regulation School sees at work here—(1) inadequate growth of Department II, leading to a disproportionality between Department I and Department II, and (2) pressures against the growth of wages, leading to inadequate incomes to purchase the growing output from ever rising capital investment—are precisely the ones which advocates of the underconsumptionist position, from Malthus to Sweezy, have seen as the source of capitalist crisis.<sup>78</sup> Yet no mechanism has yet been provided to show why these factors—both tending to issue in inadequate consumer demand—should generate serious problems. If profit rates rise in the capital-goods sector owing to increased investment opportunities, why should further investment not flow into capital goods until profit rates equalize? In parallel manner, why is it that supposedly insufficient demand for consumer goods—and therefore for capital goods in Department II—will not be more than offset by demand for capital goods by firms seeking to remain competitive through investment and technical change (which itself will lead to increased consumer demand by bringing about increased employment)?<sup>79</sup>

It is somewhat curious, in this respect, that the Regulationists make no reference to the one serious attempt in the past half-century to

<sup>77</sup> 'Technical Change', p. 83. See also Boyer's statement to the same effect, quoted above, p. 65 and n. 35.

<sup>78</sup> See M. Bleaney, *Underconsumption Theories. A History and Critical Analysis*, New York 1976.

<sup>79</sup> It should perhaps be mentioned in passing that full-blooded Keynesians—as opposed to Marxist ones—have eschewed underconsumptionist arguments for a focus not on inadequate consumption per se, but insufficient aggregate demand, specifically insufficient investment. Marxists tend to be barred from this route by their insistence that capitalist competition leaves producers little choice but to invest so long as the rate of profit is above the rate of interest, they have therefore been obliged to focus not on inadequate investment, but on the contradictory effects of investment. The exception (that follows the rule) are those Marxists, notably Baran and Sweezy, inspired in part by Steindl and Kalecki, who see a tendency to stagnation in modern economics as emerging with, and attributable to, precisely the stifling of competition with the rise of monopoly and monopoly's inhibiting effect on investment. See P. Baran and P. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, New York 1966.

demonstrate the logical necessity of crises of underconsumption—an effort that actually has the same point of departure as theirs. Paul Sweezy, like Aglietta et al., thus begins from the premiss that Department I grows faster than Department II in consequence of the competitive pressure to accumulate and innovate. (Another way of stating this would be that investment grows faster than consumption as a portion of national income.) His second premiss, viewed as technologically determined, is that the result of increases in investment will be increases in output proportional to the increase in means of production; that is, that with increased investment, the incremental capital/output ratio will remain constant. He concludes that because necessarily proportionally increased investment will lead to proportionally ever greater output, while consumption takes an ever decreasing proportion of national income, output will outrun consumption.<sup>60</sup>

But there are two errors in Sweezy's argument. The first, already mentioned, is the unwarranted assumption that rising investment necessarily entails a roughly proportionate increase in consumer-goods output. The second is the assumption that increased investment, taking up a greater share of national output, will not only produce a larger quantity of goods (use-values), but also produce goods of greater value, which cannot by hypothesis be bought. In fact, increased investment, while bringing about an increase in physical units of output, will, in consequence of the technical change embodied, produce units of less value than before—that is, an aggregate output in value terms that may still be able to be consumed. The upshot is that there is no problem in specifying a path of stable capital accumulation, in accord with Sweezy's two premisses, that avoids underconsumption.<sup>61</sup>

To sum up: none of the many different theorists of the inevitability of realization/underconsumption crises has yet put forward a systematic and general argument to show that realization will not take place by way of the increased aggregate demand that stems from: (i) further expansion of capital investment (demand for capital goods), under the pressure of competition requiring technical change and through use of the new labour forces that are almost always available; (ii) new consumer spending by the labour forces employed to make the additional capital goods; (iii) the rising wages that can usually be expected to accompany technical change over any temporally extended process of capital accumulation; (iv) unproductive expenditures. The point obviously is not that serious problems of effective demand cannot arise; it is merely that accumulation through the relative growth of Department I vis-à-vis Department II leading to an increase in relative surplus value, in the absence of institutions assuring a workers' consumption norm, does not, in itself, constitute an adequate mechanism for determining the appearance of such problems.

<sup>60</sup> P. Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, New York 1941, pp. 186–9.

<sup>61</sup> The mathematical demonstration is available, on request, from the authors. For a refutation of Sweezy's argument, see S. Mage, 'The "Law" of the Falling Tendency of the Rate of Profit', Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1963, pp. 133–9.

It needs to be emphasized that, in the course of capital accumulation, the growth of demand and consumption will in fact generally take place much more quickly and efficaciously through a rise in investment leading to the hiring of more workers than through an increase in wages per worker. For example, in the postwar US, changes in employment account for some 80 per cent of the changes in aggregate demand.<sup>62</sup> Especially for this reason, theories that seek to understand crisis as the result of a lack of effective demand would seem obliged to provide some other mechanism—not just insufficient working-class consumption—that leads to insufficient investment.

### 3. Did the Development of an Intensive Regime of Accumulation under the Competitive Mode of Regulation Bring About a Structural Crisis of Underconsumption in the 1920s?

In the Regulationists' model, the problem of mass consumption emerged in potential as soon as the regime of intensive accumulation had been established. Indeed, following the argument initially advanced by Alvin Hansen and other Keynesian interpreters of the Great Depression, the Regulationists believe that the crisis of the 1930s was delayed as long as it was only because certain historically contingent factors—above all, the continuing possibilities of 'the frontier'—tended to counteract the uneven development of Department I and underconsumption.<sup>63</sup> What is the evidence for this? Did the rise of intensive accumulation within the context of the competitive mode of regulation create the structural problems of uneven development of Department I and underconsumption that resulted in the interwar crisis? Was that the reason why special institutions had to be created to ensure workers' consumption, thereby avoiding or transcending crisis and achieving successful development in the long run?

First, we need to insist again that there is no evidence—quite the contrary—to support the Regulationists' basic thesis that intensive accumulation was fundamentally incompatible with competitive regulation, requiring an institutionally insured workers consumption norm to achieve stability. Despite a secular trend to significantly rising productivity, wages were able to maintain, and perhaps even increase, their share in national income over the period 1850–1914, as follows:

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<sup>62</sup> M. Glick, unpublished manuscript (available from the authors on request).

<sup>63</sup> Hansen, the leader of the first generation of US Keynesians, naturally saw the underlying problem as one of lack—or disappearance—of investment opportunities. In addition to the end of the frontier, he refers to declining population growth, declining technical requirements of fixed capital for innovation, and the maturation of certain key industries. See *Full Recovery or Stagnation?*, New York 1938, esp. chapter XIX on 'Investment Outlets and Stagnation'; also 'Economic Progress and Declining Population', *American Economic Review*, xxix, March 1939. Cf. P. Sweezy, 'Why Stagnation?', *Monthly Review*, xxxiv, June 1982; 'The Crisis of American Capitalism', *Monthly Review*, xxxii, October 1980; 'The Economic Crisis in Historical Perspective', *Monthly Review*, xxvi, March 1975.

Table IV.  
Wages share in GNP (%)

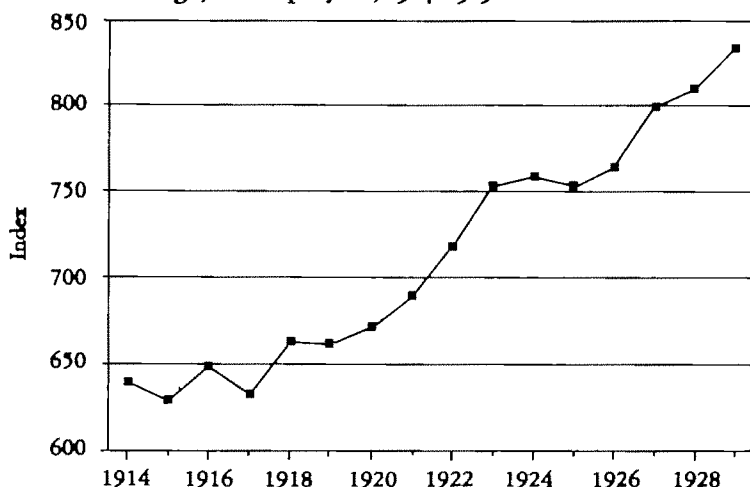
1849-50	46.1
1859-60	45.4
1869-70	50.3
1879-80	50.9
1889-90	56.8
1899-1900	51.5
1909-1910	53.1

Source: E C Budd, 'Factor Shares, 1850-1910', in *Trends in the American Economy in the Nineteenth Century*, Studies in Income and Wealth, vol. 34, National Bureau of Economic Research, Princeton 1960, p. 373.

But what of the crisis of the 1920s? The Regulationists argue that capitalists were then installing the new technologies of Fordist mass production at an unprecedentedly rapid rate. This increased the proportion of investment funds going to Department I vis-à-vis Department II and radically increased productivity growth. But because wages were held down in favour of profits, a crisis resulted from disproportionality between the two departments and lack of sufficient working-class consumption. We should therefore expect to find, during the twenties, a trend for the profit rate and the profit share to rise at the expense of wage growth and the wage share and for consumption to lose out to investment. What is the evidence?

First of all, far from being held down, real wages in the manufacturing sector rose dramatically in the period from the end of World War I. By 1924 they were about 33 per cent higher than they had been in 1914 and about 44 per cent higher than in 1917. After that, they remained roughly at the level of 1924 until the end of the decade.

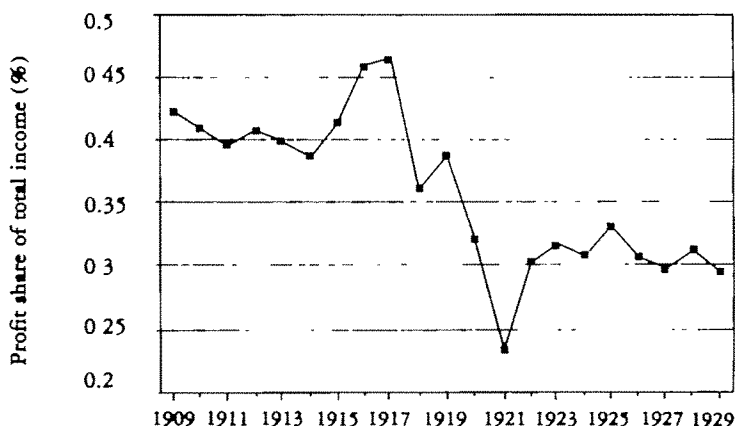
Figure II.  
Annual real wage, all employees, 1914-1919



Source: Lebergott, *Measures in Economic Growth*, p. 523.

Similarly, partly as a result of this rise in real wages, the share of profits (*vis-à-vis* wages) in national income fell precipitately during the 1920s. Whereas in the period 1900–1919 the profit share had fluctuated between 41 per cent and 48 per cent of the national income, during the period from 1922 to 1929 it fluctuated at levels between 28 per cent and 32 per cent of national income.<sup>64</sup>

Figure III.  
Profit share 1909–1929 (%)



At the same time, as Dumenil, Glick and Levy have shown, far from rising disproportionately between 1917 and 1929, the rate of return on investment (that is, the profit rate) remained on average significantly below the prewar and wartime years of 1900–1917 and, though it recovered somewhat from the immediate postwar collapse, at no time did it reach even the average rate recorded between 1900 and 1917. If the depression had found its cause in a squeeze by profits upon wages, it should have come before, not after, World War I.<sup>65</sup>

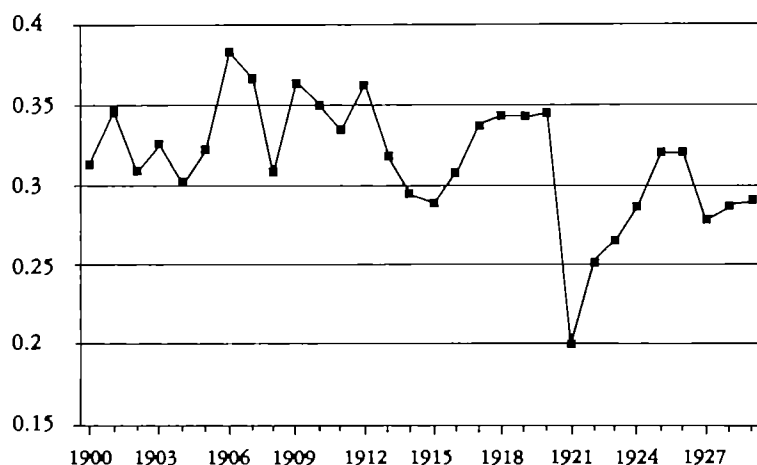
Given that the wage share rose, it is perhaps not surprising that, over the period 1919–29, there was no decline in the rate of growth of total consumption. Indeed, the proportion of consumption in total income reached levels significantly higher than it had attained in any previous decade (relevant data are available from 1890) or would reach again in any decade up to the present.<sup>66</sup> (See Figure VI, below, p. 95.)

<sup>64</sup> M. Glick, 'The Current Crisis in Light of the Great Depression', in R. Cherry et al., eds., *The Imperial Economy*, New York 1987, p. 132. Based on M. Leven et al., *America's Capacity to Consume*, Washington D C, 1934.

<sup>65</sup> G. Dumenil, M. Glick and D. Levy, 'The Rise of Profitability during World War II', *CEPREMAP*, Paris 1990. See also the data on the rate of profit over the long run, measured in various ways, in G. Dumenil, M. Glick and J. Rangel, 'The Rate of Profit in the United States', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, xi, 1987, pp. 354–5 and ff.

<sup>66</sup> For this conclusion we are indebted to G. Dumenil and D. Levy, who have generously allowed us to use their statistical results. See also, *en passant*, Temin's conclusion that 'the idea that consumption was depressed before the onset of the depression by an unfavourable distribution of income occasionally appears... The ratio of consumption to national income was not falling in the 1920s. An underconsumption view of the 1920s therefore is untenable' P. Temin, *Did Monetary Forces Cause the Great Depression?*, New York 1976, p. 32.

Figure IV.  
Rate of profit in the United States, 1900-1929 (%)



Source: Data appears courtesy of G. Dumenil and D. Levy, *CEPRIMAP*, Paris, France.

In order to buttress the hypothesis that demand was insufficient in the 1920s, Aglietta argues that the growth in consumer-durables industries fell after 1926, and that residential housing construction also declined in the same year.<sup>67</sup> Let us consider each of these points.

Aglietta maintains that the rate of profit in the consumer-durables sector was lower than average throughout the 1920s and that this manifested chronically low consumer demand. Nevertheless, he gives no evidence that there were serious problems in this sector before 1926. According to the standard work on profitability in the consumer and producer-goods industries in this period, the consumer-goods industries actually enjoyed a much higher rate of return than did the producer-goods industries: '[t]he 18 industries manufacturing producers' goods show an aggregate earnings rate that runs from 6 per cent in 1922 to 10 per cent in both 1923 and 1925 and stands at 8 per cent in 1928. The group making consumers' goods (26 industries) enjoys much higher and much steadier earnings—from 12 to 16 per cent in all years of the same period.'<sup>68</sup>

The high rate of profit in consumer goods in the 1920s was a result of the fact that 'sales in consumers' goods groups grew somewhat more rapidly than did capital investment'. Although Aglietta is right to claim that the growth in sales of consumer durables slowed after 1926, investment continued to move into this sector—that is, its rate of investment relative to the rate of investment in producer goods did not fall—because its rate of profit remained absolutely higher than

<sup>67</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 95.

<sup>68</sup> R. Epstein, *Industrial Profits in the United States*, New York 1934, pp. 180-81.

that of every other sector up to the crash of 1929. Slowing sales but high rates of return are far more suggestive of an adjustment process than of a descent into crisis.<sup>69</sup>

Aglietta further maintains that the downturn in the growth of residential housing construction was a sign of underconsumption. But although it is true that the value of residential construction declined from \$5.7 billion in 1925 to \$3.2 billion in 1929, this sector represented only 4 per cent of GNP, so a decline in its growth can hardly, in itself, constitute evidence of economy-wide problems in consumption. Moreover, as has often been argued, residential construction appears to follow its own long-term trend and the drop from 1926 seems best understood as a turning point in this cycle. In any case, any reduction in consumption that occurred as a result of the decline of residential construction was at least compensated by the growth in other sectors, for, as we have already noted, there was no longer term problem of consumption during the 1920s.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, increasingly insufficient demand should—by hypothesis—have been reflected in declining use of existing plant and equipment. The fact is, however, that there is no good evidence of a significant decline in capacity utilization in the 1920s, right up to the moment of the crash.<sup>71</sup>

This is not the place to offer an alternative account of the crisis of the interwar period. Nevertheless, one can at least suggest that the point of departure should be less changes occurring during the decade of the 1920s itself than the contrast between the economy of the 1920s and the interwar period as a whole and that of the epoch before World War I. Thus, it may be thought that the major fall in the rate of return on investment introduced into the economy of the 1920s a new fragility that made it fatally vulnerable to the various shocks that triggered the crisis—the farm crisis, international imbalances, monetary problems, and so forth. From this standpoint, the central focus for investigation into what caused the Great Depression should be the problem of what caused the drop in profitability in the period following World War I.

#### IV Mode of Development Three: Intensive Accumulation and Monopoly Regulation

In the view of the Regulation School, the crisis of the 1930s was resolved through the establishment of a new mode of *monopoly regulation*. This served to supersede the basic contradiction between intensive accumulation and competitive regulation by constituting a complex set of institutions that not only regularized inter-capitalist

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<sup>69</sup> Epstein, *Industrial Profits*, pp. 181 (quotation), 184–5.

<sup>70</sup> Temin, *Monetary Forces*, p. 67.

<sup>71</sup> M. Leven, H. Moulton and C. Warburton, *America's Capacity to Consume*, Washington D C 1934, p. 2.



competition but also, for the first time, made for significant regulation of the capital-labour wage relation and thereby allowed the growth of workers' consumption to meet the requirements of intensive capital accumulation. According to the Regulationists, the monopoly mode of regulation was not installed easily or directly, but only as a result of the massive crisis and, especially, the great class conflicts of the 1930s. The success of workers' struggles in founding the CIO and winning the Wagner Act was thus indispensable in setting off the chain of events 'whose outcome was the establishment of *social controls* to guarantee the formation of the working-class norm of consumption and to regularize its evolution'.<sup>72</sup> More generally, in Boyer's words:

In *monopolist regulation* (*régulation monopoliste*), the distribution of income is significantly socialized through a series of compromises between capital and labour (Fordist wage formation along with inflation and productivity), between firms (mark-up pricing), and between the state, citizens and capital (welfare state, pattern of public spending and tax system). Therefore the pure price adjustment mechanism bears only a minor part of the burden in adjusting social demand and production. To a large extent, a complex set of institutions, conventions and rules constantly aims at developing effective demand at the same rate as production capacity, which in turn is partially linked to the intensity and direction of technical change via the accumulation process.<sup>73</sup>

## 1. The Dynamics of Fordism and the Post-World War II Boom

Even under the unstable mode of development of the interwar period, structured by intensive accumulation and still-competitive regulation, corporations had, in the Regulationists' view, gone some distance toward stable growth by regulating inter-capitalist competition and achieving a degree of control over markets. As it matured after World War II, '*Oligopolistic competition* [...] moderate[d] possible struggles between firms by eliminating price cuts as the usual tool for obtaining market shares.' Instead, 'firms compete[d] through advertising, and more generally through product differentiation, while prices [we]re derived from a mark-up applied to average costs.'<sup>74</sup>

But the fundamental distinguishing feature of the new Fordist mode of regulation was to be found, again, on the side of demand: the 'capitalist class [now] seeks overall management of the production of wage-labour by the close articulation of relations of production with the commodity relations in which the wage-earners purchase their means of production [...] between process of production and mode of consumption.'<sup>75</sup> Most pivotal in this respect was a particular form of collective bargaining in which labour ceded to management full sovereignty over the labour process in exchange for wage increases in line

<sup>72</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 158, emphasis added.

<sup>73</sup> Boyer, 'Technical Change', p. 79.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 85 and p. 73.

<sup>75</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 117. Cf. Boyer, *Théorie de la Régulation*, p. 50.

with productivity growth and inflation.<sup>76</sup> This allowed capital to accelerate innovation without fear of workers' opposition and to make major placements of fixed capital without fear that these would fail to be realized as a consequence of sudden drops in wages and thus demand. 'Now that they could incorporate into capital advanced a future wage movement known with a high degree of probability, the corporations systematically introduced and extended the semi-automatic labour process applied to long and standardized production runs.'<sup>77</sup>

Collective bargaining was buttressed by the state's adoption of Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies, which made up for shortfalls of demand and so smoothed out the business cycle and prevented high levels of unemployment. Meanwhile, the welfare state, broadly speaking, constituted a safety-net for the structurally or temporarily unemployed and, in so doing, both redistributed income toward the working class and functioned in counter-cyclical fashion to keep the economy turning over. Finally, new institutions were fashioned to facilitate long-term consumer credit. The ultimate outcome was to allow for the regular matching of production with consumption, thus transcending the tendency toward underconsumption and providing the basis for the great postwar boom.<sup>78</sup>

## 2. Does Stable Intensive Accumulation Require Monopoly Regulation?

The Regulationists seem largely to take it for granted that, for most of the twentieth century, monopolies or oligopolies dominated markets in the United States and other advanced capitalist economies. Monopolistic control, by eliminating the likelihood of radical devalorization of capital consequent upon the invasion of markets by lower-cost producers, made possible the ongoing investment in fixed capital that was crucial to intensive accumulation. Which economic-institutional arrangements, however, allowed for monopoly in the first place? This issue immediately poses itself because the existence of monopoly signifies that some firms are securing over time *higher-than-average rates of profit*, in the face of the general drive of capitalist firms to invest wherever there are higher-than-average profit rates and, in so doing, to bring them down to the average.

In the standard view, partially rehearsed by Aglietta, the evolution of capitalism, by bringing about the growth of market concentration and a massive centralization of capital, eventuates more or less directly in the transition of capital-capital relations from competitive to

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<sup>76</sup> 'The content of collective bargaining thus shifted from working conditions to monetary gains from capitalist production, and the form of collective bargaining from a decentralized pattern of decision to an ever more centralized pattern.' Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, pp. 193-7 (quotation from p. 193). For the same emphasis and theses, see also Boyer, 'Wage/Labour Relations, Growth, and Crisis: A Hidden Dialectic', pp. 8, 10-11. Cf. Boyer, 'Technical Change', pp. 82, 85.

<sup>77</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 197.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 3; Boyer, 'Technical Change', pp. 84-6; Boyer, 'Wage/Labour Relations, Growth, and Crisis', pp. 4-12.

monopolistic regulation. Giant corporations are thus able to establish monopolistic positions by virtue of the decreasingly small numbers of firms in each industry and especially the growth of discouragingly large fixed-capital requirements to enter each field. It is sometimes additionally argued that small numbers of producers in a given industry pave the way for collusive price-fixing and control over output. As Marx put it: 'Competition rages in direct proportion to the numbers, and inverse proportion to the magnitudes of, antagonistic capitals.'<sup>79</sup>

But the problem with this view is that capitalist development has not only tended to increase concentration and the size of capital investment required for entry. It has also tended to create the *institutional forms* through which capitalists can mobilize enough abstract capital for entry into any field where producers are achieving a higher-than-average rate of profit. First, the modern corporation itself, by increasing the financial, or free, capital at the disposal of management for reallocation to the point of highest return, and by increasing the rapidity and geographical reach of such capital transfers, has forged a powerful instrument for the undermining of monopoly. This is above all true of the highly evolved corporate forms to be found in East Asia (*keiretsu* and *chaebol* of Japan and Korea, respectively), which instantiate a hitherto unprecedented degree of merger between financial and manufacturing capital and allow a hitherto unattainable degree of diversification. Secondly, the giant banks, mobilizing much of the world's capital, are in a position to offer sufficient finance for entry into any line where the rate of profit is significantly higher than average. Thirdly, capitalist states themselves, especially in the developing countries, have made possible hitherto unrealizable allocations of capital to national industries, even in lines where the potential rate of profit was not necessarily—or even potentially—higher than average. Given, moreover, modern developments in transportation and communication, firms are in a position to materialize their financial resources in the form of real productive capacity with the greatest speed in history. That competition can now emerge from such a multitude of points throughout the international system obviously makes stable monopoly massively more difficult to establish.

In response to competition, firms can of course achieve temporary monopolies (above-average rates of return) through the barrier of cost-cutting inventions; this is what drives capital accumulation and the development of the productive forces. But the barrier will eventually be dissolved by imitative competitors, who can be counted on to secure whatever means are required to enter the field and restore the rate of profit to average in that particular line.

It needs to be emphasized that the tendency to bring about average rates of return in the different lines of capitalist production cannot work itself out immediately; there is no smooth and instantaneous

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<sup>79</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, pp. 310–12. Aglietta lists such other barriers to entry as manufacturing secrets and control over supplies. Cf. B. Coriat, 'Fordism and Mass Production in the Computer Age: Issues and Perspectives', paper presented to UCLA Conference on Pathways to Industrialization and Regional Development in the 1990s, Lake Arrowhead, March 1990, p. 5. Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, p. 777.

process of adjustment. As a result, firms may, for reasons other than sole possession of an advanced productive technique, secure monopoly profits temporarily, especially in local markets. But the point is that those industries in which prices compared to costs yield higher than average profit rates will attract, *over time*, additional investment; supply will then go up until prices have fallen sufficiently to restore the rate of return to the average of the economy as a whole. To achieve long-run monopoly profit rates, industries must secure *political* barriers to entry via support from the state; but regulated industries are, of course, (at least in the United States) relatively few and becoming even fewer. Contrary to the theory of the monopoly stage of capital, which the Regulationists have more or less uncritically appropriated, the ability of corporations to erect protective barriers to competition actually decreases with the evolution of capitalism, for as the social and physical barriers of the past are overcome, the conditions for the existence of capital in the abstract are ever more fully established.<sup>80</sup> Since monopoly would seem, in historical terms, to be increasingly difficult, while capital accumulation would seem, over time, to have, if anything, become more effective in almost every respect, it is difficult to see the securing of monopoly as a central precondition for the dynamic investment path associated with intensive accumulation in general and the postwar economy in particular.

Above all, the Regulationist thesis that the dynamism of the post-World War II economy was predicated upon monopoly regulation is *prima facie* dubious for the simple reason that a very extended, historically spectacular process of long-term *intensive* capital accumulation on the basis of relative surplus-value was obviously quite possible and actually took place on the basis of the competitive mode of regulation. As we have seen, moreover, the crisis of the 1920s did not result from some 'unviability' of intensive accumulation based on competitive regulation; nor was the constitution of a Fordist norm of working-class consumption required to establish intensive accumulation on a viable basis. There thus seems little warrant for interpreting the transcendence of the crisis or the ensuing prosperity in terms of the growth of mass consumption.

### 3. The Role of Monopoly Regulation in the Postwar Boom

What, then, *was* the place of the institutions of monopoly regulation in underpinning the postwar boom and determining the pattern of capital accumulation throughout the period?

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<sup>80</sup> For the critique of the 'monopoly stage' theory, we are greatly indebted to S. Zeluck, 'On the Theory of the Monopoly Stage of Capitalism', *Against the Current*, old series, no. 1, 1981; and J.A. Clifton, 'Competition and the Evolution of the Capitalist Mode of Production', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1, June 1977. Cf. Marx's comment: 'In theory, we assume that the laws of the capitalist mode of production [notably, competition] develop in their pure form. In reality, this is only an approximation; but the approximation is all the more exact, the more the capitalist mode of production is developed and the less it is adulterated by survivals of former economic conditions with which it is amalgamated.' *Capital* Volume III, Harmondsworth 1981, p. 275.

## Monopoly

It is not possible within this compass to offer a detailed empirical discussion of the nature of inter-capitalist competition in the postwar United States. It should be mentioned in passing that the idea of an empirical link between concentration and profit rates in an industry was popularized by three influential studies carried out in the 1950s and 1960s by Bain, Stigler and Mann.<sup>82</sup> Yet, as was argued at the time, all three of these studies were biased by the fact that they were confined to the short term.<sup>83</sup> Since the mechanism tending to undercut a higher-than-average rate of profit in an industry is the redirection of investment, and since the redirection of investment requires time, any study that wishes to establish the existence of barriers to entry must take in the long run. Recent studies, using newly available data on industrial profitability over the period 1948 to 1979, have concluded that when the focus is actually on the long run, apparent industrial profit-rate differentials do indeed tend to lessen significantly.<sup>84</sup>

## The Institutions of Mass Consumption

When we turn to the role of mass consumption in the postwar boom, two observations appear especially relevant. First, the crisis was transcended well before the essential structures of monopoly regulation had been put into place. Second, the Regulationists have yet to show in just what way a new pattern of mass consumption *per se*—let alone the Fordist institutions ostensibly accounting for it—actually determined the characteristic trajectory of the US economy after World War II.

The Regulationists see the New Deal as the turning point in the establishment of Fordist institutions. This may, in retrospect, have been the case. Yet it is crucial to note that, whatever their long-term significance, the developments of the 1930s had failed to establish the foundations for mass consumption by the end of the decade. At no point during the thirties did the government adopt Keynesian methods of stoking demand through deficit spending. Government expenditures did grow, but the budget was generally kept in balance by means of tax increases.<sup>84</sup> Equally important, although the UAW's historic victory over General Motors in the winter of 1936–37 may perhaps have marked the breakthrough for the establishment of industrial unions in

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<sup>82</sup> J. Bain, 'Relation of Profit Rate to Industrial Concentration in American Manufacturing, 1936–1940', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, LXV, 1951; G. Stigler, *Capital and Rates of Return in Manufacturing Industries*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Princeton 1963; M. Mann, 'Seller Concentration, Barriers to Entry and Rates of Return in Thirty Industries 1950–1960', *Review of Economics and Statistics*, XLVIII, 1966.

<sup>83</sup> Y. Brozen, 'The Antitrust Task Force Deconcentration Recommendation', *Journal of Law and Economics*, XIII, 1970; Y. Brozen, 'Bain's Concentration and Rates of Return Revisited', *Journal of Law and Economics*, XIV, 1971. Most modern industrial structures discount the existence of such a relationship.

<sup>84</sup> M. Glick and H. Ehrbar, 'Profit Rate Equalization in the U.S. and Europe: An Econometric Investigation', *European Journal of Political Economy*, vol. IV, no. 1, 1988.

<sup>84</sup> E.C. Brown, 'Fiscal Policy in the Thirties: A Reappraisal', *American Economic Review*, XLVI, December 1956.

the US, the success of their drive for recognition was by no means assured at that point. The CIO absorbed a decisive defeat at Little Steel in 1937 and could organize no further in either auto or steel during the remainder of the decade. Until it could resume its forward march, the union movement was unable significantly to affect the course of wage growth, and further victories were not achieved until European militarization set off the new boom. The upshot was that neither the Roosevelt administration's policies nor the CIO's organizing could prevent the economy from collapsing once again in 1937-38; the unemployment rate soon soared to 20 per cent and depression continued until the run-up to war. The New Deal, in itself, had little or nothing to do with the end of the depression.

In so far as a rise in demand helped pull the economy from depression—and that was far from the full story—the impetus came not from the institutionalization of a higher level of working-class consumption but from massive deficit-spending on armaments. Following the war, of course, this continued at a spectacular level, amounting to 80 per cent of federal government purchases of goods and services and 9 per cent of GNP through 1960.<sup>85</sup>

Still, the questions that must be raised are: (1) What made artificial injections of demand such powerful stimuli? (2) Why did the boom continue for a quarter of a century? Here two facts immediately impose themselves. First, the initial exit from crisis at the end of the 1930s was marked by a vertiginous rise in the rate of profit. Equally to the point, during the quarter-century of boom from the start of the war until the middle 1960s, the rate of profit, *adjusted for capacity utilization*, averaged more than twice the rate at which it had maintained itself, on average, during the two interwar decades of crisis.<sup>86</sup> That is, the profit rate was very low during the 1920s and 1930s and very high during the 1940s, 1950s and first half of the 1960s. Growth in consumption, in demand, is incapable in itself of explaining such dramatic movements in this fundamental economic variable.

If Fordist institutions cannot directly account for the transcendence of the Depression, what evidence is there of a connection between institutionally assured mass consumption and the specific mode of development of the postwar economy, particularly the great boom? It must be doubted, in the first place, whether the so-called capital-labour accord—in which the unions ceded control over the labour process in exchange for productivity deals and cost-of-living clauses—could have played the decisive role assigned to it by the Regulationists in ensuring that consumption kept up with investment and wages kept up with profits. Following the United Auto Workers' historic settlement with GM in 1950, contractual provisions to vary wages with productivity

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<sup>85</sup> R.W. DeGraec Jr, *Military Expansion. Economy and Decline*, New York 1983, pp 20-21. Speaking more broadly, the Regulationists appear to take little note of the fact that the share of state expenditures in national income rose precipitately in the post-World War II period.

<sup>86</sup> Dumenil, Glick and Rangel, 'The Rate of Profit in the United States', pp. 351-3. Cf. Dumenil, Glick and Levy, 'The Rise of Profitability During World War II'.

and with the cost of living did become more common. But this is in no way to say that capital ever resigned itself to the principle of maintaining labour's share or failed to fight tooth and nail to limit the degree to which wages kept up with the cost of living or with productivity. There was never anything resembling a generalized 'social contract' (à la Social Democratic Sweden) on how revenue was to be divided between investment and consumption or between profits and wages. To the degree that consumption and wages did keep up with investment and profits in consequence of developments in the private sector, it was only as an unplanned outcome of myriad uncoordinated private decisions by firms about prices and myriad employer-labour conflicts over the terms of employment.

Moreover, as Aglietta himself explains, the misnamed capital-labour 'accord' represented the outcome of management's victory and the unions' defeat in an extended and very bitter process of class struggle that had begun on the morrow of World War II. By the late 1950s, the employers had largely succeeded in reappropriating the rather significant degree of shopfloor control that the unions had temporarily secured in the great struggles of the 1930s and early 1940s. In Aglietta's words, 'the entire drift of the class struggle in the United States since the war has been to transform collective bargaining into a battering ram of the employers.'<sup>87</sup> In light of this shift in the balance of class forces *in favour of capital*, it would have been surprising indeed to find employers voluntarily allowing contractual provisions that guaranteed the workers' share as the boom reached its apex.

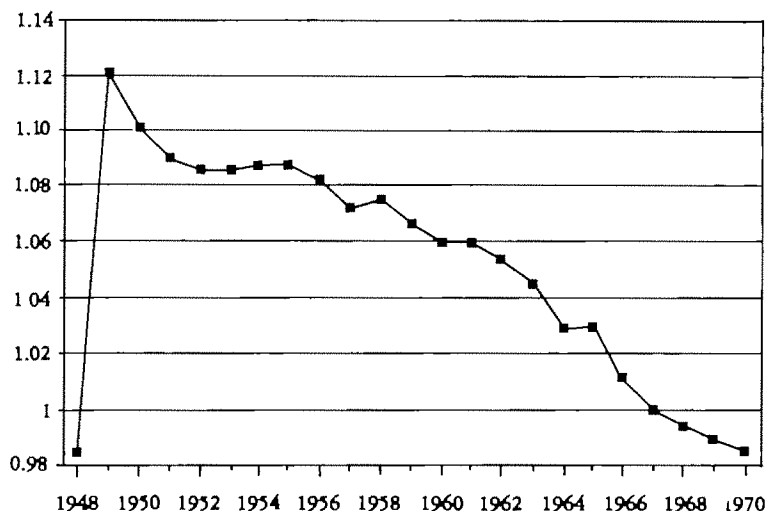
But did real wages actually keep up with productivity? In fact, the ratio of the wage index to the labour productivity index for the private nonfarm economy *falls* fairly steadily for the entire period from 1948 to 1970. In other words, wage growth lagged behind productivity growth through almost the whole of the postwar boom. As Aglietta himself notes: 'The watershed years of 1958-61 saw an acceleration in the fall in social wage costs [that is, in unit labour costs] proceeding from a sudden change in the forms of class struggle to the detriment of the wage-earners'; and the period from 1958 to 1966, the height of the boom, witnessed the 'spectacular growth of relative surplus-value', as rising labour productivity outran the growth of real wages, with the result that profitability in the corporate sector grew by some 33 per cent or more over the period 1958-66.<sup>88</sup> The epoch of 'Fordist collective bargaining', if it existed, thus lasted for a few years in the 1950s.

What about aggregate consumption? Were the other Fordist institutions, including Keynesian counter-cyclical policies and the welfare state, more effective than the capital-labour 'accord' in maintaining the level of consumption as against investment? In reality, the share of

<sup>87</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, pp. 193-5 (quotation from p. 194).

<sup>88</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, *Handbook of Labor Statistics*, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, D.C. 1973, pp. 174-5; Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, pp. 97, 99; Dumenil, Glick and Rangel, *The Rate of Profit in the United States*, p. 339.

Figure V.  
Real wage/productivity ratio, private nonfarm economy,  
1948-1970



Source: US Department of Labor, *Handbook of Labor Statistics* 1973, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington D.C. 1973, pp. 174-5.

consumption in GNP throughout the postwar boom was not only 20 per cent *lower* than it had been during the ostensibly underconsumptionist twenties, but perceptibly lower than at any other time since 1890 (outside of brief periods during the two World Wars).

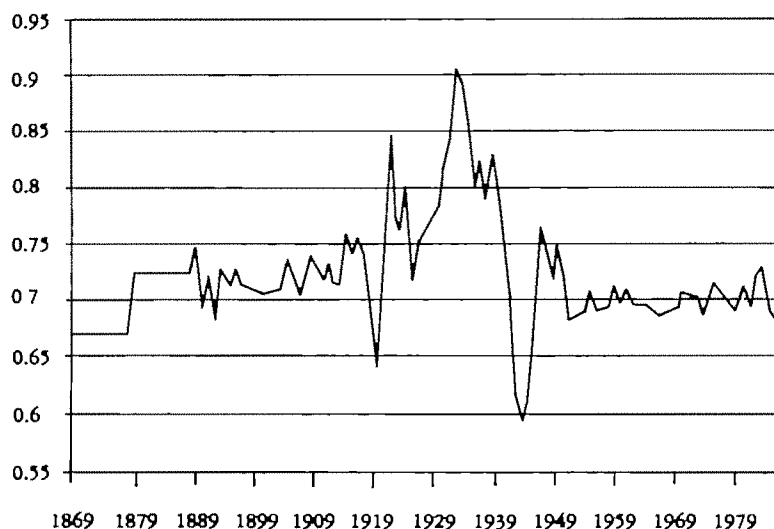
It should be emphasized in passing that the Japanese economy, undoubtedly the most dynamic since World War II, exhibited none of the consumption/investment or wages/productivity patterns that the Regulationists view as central to stable intensive accumulation. As Itoh has shown, the average annual rate of growth of labour productivity in Japan was between 50 per cent and 100 per cent higher than the rate of growth of real wages throughout the period from 1955 to 1970 (and the disparity became far greater over the fifteen years that followed). What allowed effective aggregate demand to soar was not so much rising consumption as investment in new plant and equipment, which grew at an annual pace of 22 per cent over the years 1956-73, more than twice as fast as GDP. Clearly, there was nothing inherently contradictory in a long-term growth trajectory driven by what Aglietta calls 'the uneven development of Department I'.<sup>89</sup>

Finally, it turns out that serious problems are posed for Regulation

<sup>89</sup> M. Itoh, 'The Japanese Model of Post-Fordism', paper presented to Conference on Pathways to Industrialization and Regional Development in the 1990s, Lake Arrowhead/UCLA (March 1990), pp. 5-8. As Itoh makes clear, the growth of aggregate demand in Japan was not dependent upon exports, which remained steady at about 10-12 per cent of GNP throughout the period 1955-85.



Figure VI.  
Consumption/GNP 1869-1985



Source: Data appears courtesy of G. Dumenil and D. Levy, CEREAP, Paris, France.

Theory even in specifying what was distinctive about the US growth pattern during the 'Fordist' epoch following World War II. For the powerful wave of growth was not of a different order of magnitude from that achieved in the era between the Civil War and World War I—the epoch characterized by the Regulationists in terms of extensive accumulation and competitive regulation. This can be seen by comparing a series of fundamental variables:

Table V.  
Average annual rates of growth in the United States (%)

	1870-1913	1950-1973
GDP	4.1	3.7
GDP/head	2.0	2.2
GDP/man-hr	2.0	2.6
Non-res. fixed cap. stock	4.7	4.0
Non-res. fixed cap. stock/man-hr.	2.6	2.9
Ratio of Gross Fixed Non-Residential Investment to GDP	14.5 (1880-1910)	13.2

Source: A. Maddison, *Phases of Capitalist Development*, New York 1982, pp. 45, 44, 96, 100, 109, 40.

In only one significant variable—the average annual rate of growth of productivity—are the results in the later period appreciably better. But, even here, they are no greater on average than in the 'pre-Fordist'

period from 1913 to 1950 (2.6 per cent per annum in both cases). Besides, the discrepancy with the epoch before World War I does not confirm the Regulationists' argument; for what, in their view, endows Fordist economy with its superior capacity for rapid technical change is its facilitation of fixed capital investment by overcoming the institutional barriers supposedly built into the competitive mode of regulation—specifically, craft control, inter-capitalist competition, and restricted consumer demand. And it was precisely in the rate of growth of fixed capital that the pre-World War I economy was the equal of the period after World War II.<sup>90</sup>

## V Towards a New (Fourth) Mode of Development?

### 1. The Crisis of Fordism

According to the Regulationists, the Fordist settlement of the postwar era brought stability and growth by virtue of its success in solving the problem of realization and underconsumption, which had been rooted in the tendency for Department I to grow disproportionately vis-à-vis Department II and the inability of the interwar economy to redistribute income toward labour and away from capital. At the same time, precisely by allowing the intensive regime of accumulation to reach fruition, the new mode of monopoly regulation made possible the inexorable maturation of certain fundamental contradictions that were built into the Fordist mode of development. Nevertheless, the Regulation School is not entirely clear, or at one, as to precisely what these contradictions were.

Aglietta argues that the origins of the crisis beginning in the mid 1960s, as of the interwar crisis, are to be found in the uneven development of Department I.

The watershed years of 1958–61 saw an acceleration in the fall in social wage costs [...] This inaugurated the most intense wave of accumulation in the whole history of American capitalism, which rapidly broke the dynamic equilibrium of expansion of the two departments. Department I expanded more rapidly than Department II and became more differentiated, the sub-department producing actual means of production experiencing particularly fast growth sustained by the general transformation of production processes. [...] The result was deeply unbalanced accumulation which was only maintained in so far as the relative surplus-value produced could be accumulated at an accelerated pace. This tempo could itself be maintained only if manufacturing processes were altered more and more quickly to supply the growing demand addressed to the sub-department producing means of production. 1966 saw the impending blockage of this mode of accumulation.

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<sup>90</sup> The above remarks are not meant to imply that there were no significant alterations in the post-World-War-II us economy, compared to what had come before. Cf. '[T]he acceleration of economic growth [...] after World War II [...] has not been true of the United States.' Robert A. Gordon, *Economic Instability and Growth: The American Record*, New York 1974, p. 1

There can be no doubt as to the permanence and centrality that Aglietta thus attaches to the problems of uneven development of Department I and insufficient working-class consumption. As he explains: whereas in the crisis of the 1920s, 'the real issue was the all-around establishment of the regime of intensive accumulation', the crisis beginning in the mid 1960s, 'pose[s] a deeper question: are there limits to the transformation of the conditions of existence of the wage-earning class in the form of an extension of commodity relations?' It is in relationship to this underlying contradiction that Aglietta proffers a series of possible solutions to the crisis through further 'post-Fordist' restructuring of working-class consumption—most notably, the rise of a health complex.<sup>91</sup>

There is, however, a second account of the crisis to be found in Aglietta's work, ostensibly linked to the first, which has received much greater emphasis in the studies of the leading continuators of the Paris version of Regulation Theory, most prominently Boyer and Lipietz. From this standpoint, the crisis originates when capital accumulation slips off on 'the other side' of its tightrope: it now falls prey not to the unevenness between Departments I and II but to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall as a result of labour-productivity growth insufficient to raise the rate of surplus-value to a degree that can counteract the rising organic composition of capital. The current crisis is thus 'first of all a crisis of the mode of labour organization', expressing 'the limits to the increase in the rate of surplus-value that were inherent in the relations of production organized in this type of labour process'.<sup>92</sup> Fordism as a paradigm for organizing the labour process could henceforth deliver only declining productivity growth because, over the long term, management exhausted the gains that could be secured from an intensification of labour through Taylorist time-and-motion studies, job fragmentation, shopfloor reorganization and the introduction of new machinery on the basis of existing technology. Meanwhile, workers found themselves deskilled and alienated to the point that they no longer delivered the on-the-line technical innovations crucial to the growth of productiveness. As a result: 'The development of the department producing means of production encounters a constraint, since it no longer gives rise to technical mutations leading to a further mechanization of labour, capable of generating a sufficient saving in direct labour time to compensate for the increase in the organic composition of capital.'<sup>94</sup> For the Regulationists, then, the crisis of the Fordist mode of development manifested itself in a crisis of productivity, built into the socio-technical character of the Fordist labour process itself. This led to economic crisis by bringing about a sharp fall in the rate of profit from 1966 onwards.

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<sup>91</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, pp. 99–100, 163ff.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>93</sup> As Lipietz puts it, '[T]he search for "the one best way" by Taylorist methods reaches an end with the generalization of "scientific management" at the moment where social unrest on the line and the deskilling of operatives cuts off the basis of productivity, the ingenuity of the collective worker.' 'Behind the Crisis', p. 26.

<sup>94</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 162.

## 2. From an 'Exhaustion of Fordism' to Capitalist Crisis?

The relationship, in the Regulationists' framework, between their crisis originating in the uneven development of Departments I and II from 1958 and their crisis originating in productivity-growth decline from 1966 is not entirely clear. Aglietta argues that accumulation became unbalanced in the 1958-66 period because unit labour costs decreased too rapidly, bringing about increases in the rate of surplus-value and the rate of profit that were too large because they involved a rate of growth of Department I vis-à-vis Department II that required unsustainable increases in the demand for capital goods. Yet, Aglietta also argues that the decline in the rate of productivity growth from 1966, which reflected the failure of technical change to keep up with the growth of capital (organic composition) and brought a slowdown in the rate of decrease of unit labour costs, was problematic because it resulted in a decline in the rate of profit. The immediate question, therefore, is why the slower increase in labour productivity should not have ultimately benefited capital accumulation by reducing the rate of surplus-value and the rate of profit, thereby decreasing the rate of capital accumulation and thus the level of demand for capital goods required to maintain balanced growth of Departments I and II, in this way resolving the problem set off by the uneven development of Department I. Aglietta, in other words, makes a decline in the rate of profit, resulting from lower productivity growth, problematic from 1966, when he has made an increase in the rate of profit problematic in the period immediately before. Aglietta may be having too much of a good thing, playing both sides of his tightrope against the middle.

The tendency of recent Regulationist writing has been to ignore the issue of unbalanced accumulation in the years 1958-66 and to interpret the current crisis in terms of declining marginal productivity of capital within the Fordist labour process beginning in 1966. Nevertheless, the idea that the current crisis of profitability is derived from a decline in productivity growth resulting from the exhaustion of the Fordist technological paradigm is highly paradoxical—in view of the Regulationists' own characterization of the [Taylorist]-Fordist labour process, in view of what we thought we knew about technological change under capitalism, and in view of the actual contours of the crisis itself, its timing, scope and intensity.

As has been seen, Aglietta and the Regulationists characterize the Fordist labour process as a development on machine manufacturing (or machinofacture). As Leborgne and Lipietz put it: 'As a general principle of organization of labour or "technological paradigm", *Fordism is nothing more than Taylorism plus mechanization*.' Thus Fordist-Taylorist principles involve:

a rigorous standardization of operating practices and a corresponding *separation* between [...] conception (design, engineering) on the one hand and manual manufacturing on the other hand. [...] This *rationalization through separation* has two objectives. The first is to implement [...] the most efficient method (the 'one best way') and to eliminate both experimentation [...] and malfunctioning along the workbenches [...] to obtain gains in *productivity and its strict meaning* (the physical efficiency of

each operation) by the organized socialization of collective learning by doing. The second objective [...] is to obtain, through knowledge of the time needed to carry out each operation, rigorous control of the intensity of the operative's work [...] *True Fordism* can be distinguished from Taylorism in the fact that these norms themselves are incorporated in the automatic apparatus of the machine.<sup>99</sup>

But if Fordism is nothing more than mechanization plus Taylorism plus the assembly-line—for the purposes specified by the Regulationists—it is difficult to see why it should be viewed as more than an extension of the processes of transforming technology and the labour process that have characterized capitalist production for at least a century (or perhaps two). In that case, why should machine manufacturing suddenly, in the mid 1960s, have reached a limit and ceased to be able to yield former levels of productivity growth, precipitating a crisis of the whole capitalist system.

Machinofacture, it should be remembered, is itself, conceptually and historically, the culmination of manufacture per se, the breaking up of complex, skilled tasks into their simplified, deskilled component parts (detailed labour). The application of manufacturing methods, according to Adam Smith and Karl Marx, was designed to bring about cost savings by rendering learning-by-doing easier, by making labour more continuous, by reducing expenditures on the imparting of skills, and by facilitating the introduction of machines in consequence of the simplification of tasks. Mechanization yielded gains in output/head not only by embodying new techniques that directly increased the efficiency of production, but also by increasing the intensity and continuousness of labour (filling up the pores of the working day). The increased separation of conception and execution would afford a higher level of capitalist domination of the labour process. Mechanization was, moreover, itself subject to improvement according to the principles of manufacturing in general—that is, decomposition and simplification—which made it possible to use less skilled labour, to train labour more easily, and to intensify the actual performance of labour. The innovations attributed to Taylorization by the Regulationists would seem, rather clearly, then, to represent merely variations on a long-established and very difficult-to-exhaust 'technological paradigm'.

In this context, it is rather difficult to know what to make of the

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<sup>99</sup> The first quotation is from D. Leborgne and A. Lipietz, 'Fallacies and Open Issues About Post-Fordism', *CIRREMAP* paper no. 9009, Paris 1990, p. 6 (emphasis added); the second quotation is from D. Leborgne and A. Lipietz, 'New Technologies, New Modes of Regulation: Some Spatial Implications', *Environnement et Planification D. Society and Space*, vi, 1988, p. 264. For a very similar definition/explanation of the Fordist labour process, see Aglietta, p. 118. It might be noted in passing that Henry Ford summarized the essential features of his new factory organization as follows: '[T]he keyword to mass production is simplicity. Three plain principles underlie it: (a) the planned orderly and continuous progression of the commodity through the shop; (b) the delivery of work instead of leaving it to the workman's initiative to find it; (c) an analysis of operations into their constituent parts... All three fundamentals are involved in the original act of planning a moving line production.' Quoted in Rosenberg, *Technology and American Economic Growth*, pp. 113–14, n. 26.

Regulationist idea of an exhaustion of the gains to be had from Fordism. That one should expect diminishing returns from the adoption of any *given* machine-manufacturing technique makes a certain amount of sense. The gains to be had by breaking down a production process into its simplified component parts/tasks may thus tend to be diminishing for any particular technique: there is perhaps only so much one can get from simplifying and deskilling a given labour process so as to reduce the requisite investment in 'human capital'; there are perhaps only finite gains possible from the further mechanization that can result from such simplification and deskilling. However, a great deal of further argumentation and evidence would be required to show that, after some given point in history, machinofacture *in general*—in contrast to particular mechanized manufacturing processes—should yield diminishing returns. It is in the essence of a capitalist economy that, under the pressure of competition, entirely new tools, embodying new techniques, will be brought in to carry out old processes. It is also in the essence of a capitalist economy that entirely new products will regularly be introduced to fulfil old or new needs, probably involving at least some degree of innovation in production. These new techniques will, in their turn, eventually be subject to simplification and deskilling, to Taylorization broadly conceived, but also to replacement by new products and processes, and so on *ad infinitum*. It is interesting to note that F.W. Taylor himself was obsessively concerned with the improvements that could be had through reorganization of the labour process, rather than through the introduction of new technology.<sup>96</sup> But since new technologies are central to the ongoing transformation of production, there seems no reason to expect that an 'exhaustion of the Fordist labour process' would lead to a generalized crisis bound up with declining rates of productivity growth.

If the Regulationists continue to advance this thesis, then, it would appear to be because they tend to interpret technological change in general, and mechanization in particular, as if they were simply processes by which the workers' knowledge and energy in production are appropriated by capital under the pressure of class struggle. According to Aglietta:

[T]he capitalist mode of production has systematically brought into being systems of productive forces able to link absolute and relative surplus-value closely together. Their basis is the *principle of mechanization* [Aglietta's emphasis], which incorporates in its mode of operation the qualitative characteristics of those concrete labours previously performed by the dexterity of workers. The machine system is a complex of productive forces in which a series of tools is set in motion by a mechanical source of energy, the motor. [...] By

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<sup>96</sup> Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, p. 233. 'Taylor and his disciples had virtually nothing to say [at this point] about what different machinery might do for efficiency. Their thinking was riveted on commandeering the craftsman's knowledge.' In contrast, '[T]he Chicago-based journal *Factory*... abounded with "trips through the world's great factories" and articles on electric motors, new milling machines, hoists, cranes, fire prevention, cost analysis, time card belting, and plant layouts—but not pay systems or functional foremanship.' (Of course, as Montgomery explains, Taylor had himself earlier made spectacularly important technical contributions. See above, footnote 23.)

*transferring the qualitative characteristics of labour to the machine, mechanization reduces labour to a cycle of repetitive movements that is characterized solely by its duration, the output norm. This is the foundation of the homogenization of labour in production. All modifications in the organization of work represent a further expression of this principle.*

More baldly put, "technology" is nothing but the embodiment of skilled activity into machinery.<sup>97</sup> These formulations tend to reduce technological change in general, and mechanization in particular, to an aspect of the class struggle, carried out by capital for the purpose of reducing workers' control so as to increase workers' exploitability, especially through the intensification of labour (but also presumably the limitation of wage increases).<sup>98</sup> Such a vision helps make sense of the Regulationists' argument, noted earlier, that the craft-controlled labour process could so fetter capitalist manufacturing as to prevent significant increases in the organic composition of capital and productiveness for three-quarters of a century, and correlatively, that, following capital's epoch-making victory over skilled labour, the introduction of the Taylorist labour process could facilitate revolutionary gains for capital. The same conception also informs the thesis that concerns us now: namely, that the gains from Taylorizing/Fordizing the labour process—secured largely through deskilling, mechanization, and speedup (though also learning-by-doing)—are exhausted. But it is, to say the least, extremely one-sided.

Mechanization has, of course, as the Regulationists emphasize, very much facilitated increased surplus extraction through weakening skilled workers' power on the shop floor (and beyond), thus making possible the intensification of labour and, more generally, capitalists' ability to secure increased worker inputs, and thus outputs, for the same wage. Yet, it has also introduced incalculable—and accelerating—increases in productiveness (and thereby increases in relative surplus-value) by incorporating advances in scientific and technical understanding, achieved to some extent by skilled operatives, but, increasingly in recent times, by applied scientists and engineers—an aspect of mechanization that the Regulationists very much play down in framing their view of the current crisis as a crisis of productivity. Since just after the middle of the nineteenth century, an increasing

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<sup>97</sup> Quotations are from Aglietta, p. 113 (emphasis added, except as indicated); and A. Lipietz, 'An Alternative Design for the Twenty-First Century', CEFREMAP, Paris, p. 14. Mike Davis summarizes Aglietta's position in the following way: 'Important changes in the work process are expressions of the class struggle. And all modifications of the labor process which the class struggle may necessitate are extensions or reinforcements of the global principle of *mechanization*, i.e. "of transferring of the qualitative characteristics of labor to the machine"' "Fordism" in Crisis', p. 222.

<sup>98</sup> As Lipietz puts it, 'change in the relationship of forces between classes is the goal of technical change, and competition only the "coercive force" that obliges everyone to conform to the general tendency.' A. Lipietz, 'Conflits de répartition et changements techniques dans la théorie marxiste', *Économie Appliquée*, xxxiii, 1986, p. 523-4 (our translation). Lipietz further argues that, 'If the Taylorist movement chose to cancel these [intellectual] capacities [of skilled workers], it was for a political reason, a micro-political shopfloor one, but also a macropolitical, state level one. In fact, a highly skilled, highly conscious, highly active worker may contest the control of management upon the intensity of his or her work on the line, of the product, or the sharing out of gains from productivity.' 'An Alternative Design for the Twenty-First Century', p. 18.

proportion of technological change has been dependent upon prior advances in systematized knowledge, based on the improved understanding of the forces of nature achieved beyond the production process itself. Today, some of the most spectacular sources of productivity increase within Fordist manufacturing itself are obviously science-based—cads, cams, robotics, and so on. Moreover, beyond manufacturing narrowly conceived, there have emerged a whole series of new industries—the computer revolution, biotechnology, materials, etc.—which can in no obvious way be seen to represent the mechanization of production formerly done by hand. In view of the quite massive extent to which technical change in production can be seen to be independent not merely of the Taylorist–Fordist assembly line but of machinofacture itself, it is hard to understand on what basis the Regulationists could look to explain a productivity crisis in manufacturing in terms of a crisis of the Fordist labour process.<sup>99</sup>

### 3. To What Extent Can a Crisis of Productivity, Derived from a Crisis of the Fordist Labour Process, Account for the Current Capitalist Crisis?

Even if we were to believe that a long-term trend toward the exhaustion of the Fordist technological paradigm caused a decline in productivity growth, it would still not satisfactorily explain the onset of the profitability crisis that the Regulationists rightly see as the root of the current situation. More specifically, it could not account for the *simultaneous and general* character of the crisis on an international scale, the *suddenness* of its onset, and the extreme *sharpness* and *depth* of the fall, marking a clear discontinuity with previous trends.

All of the advanced capitalist economies began to experience the crisis of profitability at virtually the same time, in the years between 1966 and 1970, and since then all have experienced its various stages in virtual lockstep. The profit rate began to fall in 1966–67 in the United States,<sup>100</sup> and only a year or two later in both Japan and Germany. Up to 1974–75 profits plummeted everywhere, with the drop-off in Japan at least equalling that of the United States. Henceforward, the successive booms and busts were likewise marked by their synchrony. The question which must be asked of the Regulationists, then, is whether it is at all likely that such a generalized crisis could actually express separate but essentially identical trends of productivity, based on essentially parallel evolutions of technology in relationship to socioeconomic institutions in every advanced capitalist nation.<sup>101</sup>

It is not at all easy to see why different industries—Fordist or non-Fordist—built at different times, with different machinery, and with

<sup>99</sup> For an extensive discussion of the increasing role of scientific discoveries in technical change over the past century and a half, see Rosenberg, pp. 113–71.

<sup>100</sup> See Dumenil, Glick and Rangel, 'The Rate of Profit in the United States'.

<sup>101</sup> For the international fall in profitability, see G. Dumenil, M. Glick and J. Rangel, 'The Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall: Part II', *Contemporary Marxism*, no. 11, Fall 1985; and J. Armstrong, A. Glyn and J. Harrison, *Capitalism Since World War II*, London 1984, pp. 255–7.



different growth paths reflecting divergent trends in demand and capital spending, should have experienced sharply declining productivity *at the same time*; nor why this should have been true of whole manufacturing economies with such distinct postwar experiences, structured by such specific institutional frameworks. The US economy was essentially rebuilt during World War II and in its aftermath. In contrast, the Japanese manufacturing economy did not really begin to be reconstructed until the mid 1950s or so and was thus able to start from significantly more modern techniques than were in place in the US, not to mention its more powerful institutions supporting capital investment and technical advance. Moreover, the Japanese economy, over the quarter-century from 1950, and beyond, increased its fixed capital at more than twice the US rate and its productivity three times faster. If the two economies nevertheless underwent major declines in profitability at more or less the same time, is it at all likely that these were both caused by simultaneous large-scale drops in efficiency?

Not only was the fall in the rate of profit synchronized internationally, it also involved a sharp discontinuity. Between 1950 and 1966, the manufacturing profit rate adjusted for capacity utilization was stable; but from 1966 to 1974 it fell precipitately. By what possible mechanism could a decline in productivity increase that was ostensibly the result of the declining capacity of a technological paradigm to produce productivity growth take place so as to produce that profitability pattern? Even if one could somehow expect similar patterns of Fordist industrial development to lead to relatively synchronized productivity falls across industries and across nations, it would seem reasonable to expect that such declines would occur gradually and be spread over a significant time period.<sup>102</sup>

Finally, manufacturing profitability in the United States was cut in half between 1966 and 1974: that is, investments in labour plus machinery plus circulating capital became fifty-per-cent less profitable than they had been just a few years before. It is very difficult to understand how the growth of economic efficiency could have declined so abruptly as to cause such a huge drop in the rate of return, let alone to see it as the result of a long-term exhaustion of the Fordist labour process.

### Was There a Crisis of Productivity Growth?

In order to substantiate their case, the Regulationists would at the very least have to show that there actually *was* a decline in the rate of

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<sup>102</sup> It should be noted that the Regulationists sometimes add that intensified class struggle—resulting apparently from employers' attempts to counteract the decreasing returns from the old methods by stepping up their pressure on workers—helped to bring about the productivity crisis. Here their work partially converges with that of the School of Social Structure of Accumulation. The emphasis on class struggle might help to account for the putative discontinuity of the productivity/profitability decline, but it would only make more difficult the problem of accounting for its synchronization throughout the OECD countries. The class-struggle account of the crisis will be considered in R. Brenner, 'U.S. Decline and the International Capitalist Crisis', forthcoming in *NLR*.

productivity increase behind the decline in the rate of profit. But this is hardly borne out by an examination of the historical record in manufacturing, necessarily the locus of any exhaustion of Fordism. This sector suffered a decline in profitability in the first phase of the crisis significantly greater than that for the economy as a whole: its rate of profit fell from a peak of 12 per cent in 1965 to around 10 per cent in 1966 and around 4 per cent in 1970, with a rise to 6 per cent in 1973 and then a further fall to under 3 per cent in 1974; in the same period, the average rate of return on assets in the non-financial business sector fell from around 12.5 per cent in 1966 to around 6.75 per cent in 1974.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, figures provided by Bowles, Gordon and Weisskopf show that, over the years 1966–73, labour productivity actually *rose* by an annual average of 3.3 per cent in the manufacturing sector as compared to 2.9 per cent over the years 1948–66.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, if one makes use of what appear to be the best available productivity indices—the direct-quantity indices compiled by the Federal Reserve Board only for the manufacturing sector, rather than the deflated value indices produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics—the increase in the productivity growth-rate in manufacturing during the first phase of the profitability crisis appears to be even greater. The Federal Reserve Board's figures show manufacturing productivity rising at an annual rate of 4.24 per cent for the years of rapidly falling manufacturing profitability 1966–73, in comparison with an annual rate of 2.65 per cent over the boom period 1948–66.<sup>105</sup>

In response to the figures showing an increase in the growth-rate of manufacturing labour productivity for the period of falling profitability, Regulation School theorists have pointed out that the capital/labour ratio grew even faster. Whereas the growth of manufacturing productivity was about 1.6 times faster over the period 1966–73 than over the period 1948–66, the growth of the capital/labour ratio was twice as fast. These data could be interpreted as expressing a fall in overall productivity growth, such that workers achieved less increase in output than before from a similar increase of capital at their disposal.<sup>106</sup>

What, then, *were* the productivity trends, taking capital, not just labour, inputs into account? Kendrick and Grossman and Gollop and Jorgenson provide figures indicating that the rate of growth of *total factor* productivity did fall significantly in the period of falling profit rate after the mid 1960s, in comparison with the period of rising profitability from the late 1950s to the mid 1960s.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, this

<sup>103</sup> Dumenil, Gluck and Rangel, 'The Rate of Profit in the United States', pp. 340–42, B.P. Bosworth, 'Capital Formation and Economic Policy', *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (1982), no. 2, p. 293.

<sup>104</sup> *Beyond the Wasteland*, New York 1983, p. 31, Fig. 2.4

<sup>105</sup> V. Perlo, 'The False Claims of Declining Productivity', *Science and Society*, Fall 1982, pp. 298ff

<sup>106</sup> Liptetz, 'Behind the Crisis', pp. 22–6

<sup>107</sup> J.W. Kendrick and E.S. Grossman, *Productivity in the United States Trends and Cycles*, Baltimore 1980, p. 35; F.M. Gollop and D.W. Jorgenson, 'U.S. Productivity Growth by Industry, 1947–1973', in J.W. Kendrick and B.N. Baccara, eds., *New Developments in Productivity Measurement and Analysis*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Studies in Income and Wealth, vol. 44, Chicago 1988, pp. 19–20. Calculation made by aggregating figures for individual industries in Table 1.3 on basis of capital stock figures for industries

fall in measured total factor productivity growth cannot be used to show that a decline in efficiency or productiveness actually occurred, let alone that such a fall reflected the exhaustion of a technological paradigm and caused a fall in the rate of profit.

Table VI.

Total Factor Productivity Growth in Manufacturing Sector

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1947-53	.0090
1953-57	.0008
1957-60	-.0212
1960-66	.0162
1966-73	.0108

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Source: Calculated from Gollop and Jorgenson, 'Productivity growth in the U.S. by Industry, 1947-1973', Table I.3.

First of all, while it is true that growth in total factor productivity was lower in the late 1960s and early 1970s than in the immediately preceding period of high boom, the fact is that its growth over the whole period from 1960 to 1973 was significantly higher than in any other period since World War II. This would seem directly to contradict the Regulationist hypothesis that productivity decline resulted from the growing failure of the Fordist technological paradigm. Furthermore, the lack of correlation during the postwar period between profitability—which was high until the mid sixties and thenceforth in decline—and total factor productivity—which, as here measured, was low until the early sixties and high thereafter—casts serious doubt on the whole idea that a fall in productivity for the period immediately after 1966 was responsible for the profitability decline. In fact, when the figures on total factor productivity are adjusted for capacity utilization—that is, to take account of the capital actually used in production, rather than that merely in place—there simply is no decline in total factor productivity growth in the period of falling and low profitability from 1966 to 1974 in comparison to that in the period of increasing and high profitability from 1948 to 1966. As Kendrick's and Grossman's conclusion is that 'the farm and manufacturing sectors showed no statistically significant decline in their productivity trends since 1966'.<sup>108</sup>

## VI Conclusion

The general weakness of Regulation Theory, paradoxical though this may seem, is its failure to take adequately into account the broader system of capitalist social-property relations that forms the backdrop to their succession of institutionally defined phases. The Regulationists want to develop a set of historically founded concepts as intermediate links between high theory and economic history and, in particular, to demonstrate that the institutional evolution of capitalism is the key to its history. Their key intermediate notion is the mode of development, constituted by a mode of regulation and a regime of accumulation.

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<sup>108</sup> *Productivity in the United States*, p. 48 and Table 3.8.

But since each mode of development must represent a phase within the evolution of, and thus a variation upon, the capitalist mode of production per se,<sup>99</sup> it would appear necessary to understand the emergence, the reproduction, and the effects of the modes of regulation that guide each regime of accumulation at least *partly* in terms of the general constraints constituted by capitalist social-property relations. This is, first of all, because capitalist social-property relations, once established, impose on the individual economic units or actors certain necessary forms of economic behaviour—maximization of the price/cost ratio for the sale of their goods by appropriately specializing, by accumulating surpluses, and by bringing in the latest technique, on pain of going out of business under the pressure of competition. The aggregate developmental tendencies that result—tendencies for medium-run prices to reflect costs of production, for rates of profit in different lines of production to equalize, for obsessive capital accumulation, and for the unprecedented development of the productive forces—distinguish capitalism from all other types of economy. Secondly, capitalist social-property relations, once established, form a sort of field of natural selection for the emergence and reproduction of historically specific economic institutions themselves. The failure of the Regulationists, in practice, to take adequate account of these general and distinctive features of the capitalist mode of production, lies behind very many of the central conceptual and empirical weaknesses in the theory that we have tried to bring out in the course of this essay.

### Social-Property Relations or Institutions?

The insensitivity of the Regulationists to the distinction between the effects on the pattern of capital accumulation that they attribute to different institutions within capitalism and the effects attributable to the broader framework of social-property relations, capitalist or pre-capitalist (or non-capitalist), is manifest in the very modes of regulation and development that the Regulationists identify. Although they do not make much of it, they identify an 'ancient' or 'traditional' mode of regulation, supposedly preceding the competitive mode of regulation, in which 'the agricultural sector plays a dominant role, since modern capitalist industry is only emerging. This produces a unique cyclical pattern: every bad harvest leads to soaring prices of corn and more generally agricultural prices; hence peasants cannot buy industrial goods and the industrial sector is hit by the second round of crisis; then workers are fired and the nominal wage is lowered even if the general price level is climbing. The "regulation" is by nature *stagflationist*, since it associates unemployment with inflation.'<sup>100</sup> But the obvious problem here is that the developmental pattern to which the Regulationists refer—originally identified by the French economic historian C.-E. Labrousse—is inexplicable in terms of a properly capitalist network of institutions that could constitute a mode of regulation.

<sup>99</sup> 'For the "Regulationists" the point of departure is the impact of the ensemble of social relations—commodity and/or wage-labour—on economic regularities.' Boyer, *Théorie de la Régulation*, p. 22 (our translation).

<sup>100</sup> Boyer, 'Technical Change', pp. 77–8. Cf. 'Wage/Labour Relations, Growth and Crisis', p. 9.

Prevailing not only in France before the Revolution, but also throughout much of Europe during the medieval and early-modern period and beyond, the social-structural roots of the (mis-termed) ancient or traditional mode of development were to be found in the *procapitalist* social formations of that epoch, specifically in the dominance of a structure in which peasant property was a central element. Because peasants possessed their means of subsistence, they were not *dependent* upon the market, so were not required to maximize their price/cost ratio by specializing, by innovating, by improving, or by moving to the line with the best rate of return. They tended instead to adopt as their rule for reproduction 'production for subsistence'—that is, diversifying production to cover necessities and marketing only physical surpluses. The agricultural productive forces therefore tended to stagnate and productivity to decline over the long run with the growth of population. The outcome was a built-in vulnerability to harvest failures, which tended to occur in bunches, bringing on 'crises of subsistence' characterized by the sudden, extreme increase in prices that are a distinctive feature of the Regulationists' 'ancient' or 'traditional' mode of development. The key to the ensuing pattern of crisis was to be found in the peasants' response to high prices.

Since peasants were not required to increase productiveness to maximize returns, and were anyway not very capable of doing so, they did not much raise output in response to high prices (as capitalist farmers would have done). Producing only limited output for the market, and purchasing only limited inputs from it, the peasants were, correlatively, unable to gain much in income and purchasing power in consequence of the high prices (as again market-dependent capitalist farmers would have been able to do). High grain prices therefore reduced the discretionary purchasing power of workers while failing to increase the discretionary purchasing power of peasants; total industrial demand and industrial wages fell, unemployment rose, yet agricultural prices remained high over a period of several years (the Regulationists' 'stagflation').<sup>121</sup> It should thus be evident how misleading it is to refer to an ancient or traditional 'mode of regulation' as conceptually equivalent to the 'competitive' and 'monopoly' modes;<sup>122</sup> or to imply that the aforementioned pattern of development is explained in terms of a historically specific network of capitalist institutions (that could constitute a mode of regulation). The ancient or traditional pattern of development is incomprehensible as a function of capitalist institutional forms of any sort, but must, on the contrary, be understood as the effect of a system of social-property relations quite distinct from those of capitalism.

It may seem pedantic to tax the Regulationists for this misleading

<sup>121</sup> On subsistence crises and Labrousse's analysis, see J. Meuvret, *Le problème des subsistances à la époque Louis XIV*, 2 vols, Paris 1977 (esp. 'Introduction générale'); J. Meuvret, 'Les crises des subsistances et la démographie de la France d'ancien régime', *Populations* (1946); W.G. Hoskins, 'Harvest Fluctuations and English Economic History, 1480–1619', *Agricultural History Review*, xii, pt. 1, 1964; D. Landes, 'The Statistical Study of French Crises', *Journal of Economic History*, vol. x, no. 2, 1950.

<sup>122</sup> For Boyer's conceptually confused formulation, see 'Wage/Labour Relations, Growth and Crisis', p. 9.

conceptualization of historically rather distant patterns of development. Their project is, after all, to demonstrate the significance of varying networks of institutional forms for variations in the pattern of capital accumulation *within capitalism*.<sup>13</sup> The point we wish to stress, however, is that their failure adequately to distinguish between the economic effects of a broad framework of pre-capitalist social-property relations and those of properly capitalist institutions undermines the Regulationists' entire theoretical edifice, for it leads them to propose an untenable theorization of the history of capitalism *per se* from the mid-nineteenth century to the late 1960s.

On the one hand, as we have tried to demonstrate, in so far as the Regulationists identify historical cases of the regime of intensive accumulation, and supply a convincing theoretical account—and they barely begin to do so—their explanation must rely on the effects *not* of properly capitalist institutions, as is called for by their theory, but on the broader framework of pre-capitalist social-property relations that shaped manufacturing development. What, specifically, appears responsible for the pattern of accumulation identified by the Regulationists as characterized predominantly by absolute surplus value and restricted mass consumption is a socioeconomic environment composed of only partially proletarianized peasant agricultural producers, available for industrial employment on the basis of cheap wages. This offered only restricted potential for the growth of collective labour, thus of consistent productivity advance and accumulation on the basis of relative surplus-value, and very limited possibilities for growth of the home market.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, in so far as the Regulationists refer to the effects of a specific set of specifically capitalist institutions to explain how the competitive mode of regulation could so fetter the growth of the productive forces as to structure a pattern of predominantly extensive accumulation—and why a breakthrough to monopolistic regulation was necessary to make possible stable intensive accumulation—their arguments are vitiated precisely by their systematic neglect of the overriding effects of the broader structure of capitalist social-property relations, especially the built-in competitive constraint. The economic tendencies or pressures they attribute to the presence of given institutions are thus either overridden by counter-tendencies inherent in capitalist social-property relations *per se* or, in consequence of those relations, have insufficiently broad and long-lasting effects to determine a whole distinctive regime of capital accumulation.

The Regulationists make the justifiable point that the risk associated

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<sup>13</sup> Although it must be added that their positing of a 'scarcity' mode of regulation (to comprehend Eastern Europe and the USSR) that possesses the same conceptual status as the competitive and the monopoly—as well as the traditional/ancient—modes of regulation hardly inspires confidence. See Boyer, 'Wage/Labour Relations, Growth and Crisis', p. 9. It should be evident that what has obtained in Eastern Europe and the USSR is not an institutionally specific variant of capitalism (capitalism here defined in terms of commodity production and wage labour, with labour-power as a commodity), but quite another type of system of social-property relations, which itself displays institutional variations according to time and place.

<sup>14</sup> See above, pp. 61–4.

with a highly competitive environment tends to discourage innovations that depend on increasingly large-scale placements of fixed capital. But they seem to ignore the equally obvious point that a highly competitive environment will make those same investments unavoidable for firms wishing to survive and, in the medium run, will stimulate institutional innovations that enhance the capacity of firms to cope with risk.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, the Regulationists not unreasonably propose that, *so long as it is maintained*, the craft-controlled labour process can limit mechanization and productivity growth. The problem is that the productive relations of the labour process to which they here refer are constituted *within the firm*, subject to competition from other cost-cutting firms. It is theoretically conceivable that trade unions, organizing (part of) the working class beyond the individual units, could have secured the reproduction of craft control within the individual units precisely by exercising their collective power through-out the whole of an industry and so countering the competitive pressure on firms to pursue technological rents (temporary superprofits) via innovation and to copy innovating competitors. In practice, however, unions would have faced insurmountable difficulties in exerting such wide-reaching and durable power as to dictate predominantly extensive accumulation for a whole economy over a whole epoch.<sup>156</sup> Finally, and analogously, the Regulationists emphasize that a highly competitive labour market will tend to limit aggregate consumption by restricting wage gains, and that restricted growth of aggregate consumption will tend to discourage productivity-enhancing capital investments in Department II. But they seem to neglect the equally obvious counter-tendencies for competition among accumulating, cost-cutting firms on the product and labour markets to stimulate the growth of mass consumption, not only by bringing about the increased employment of wage workers and growing wages, but also by stimulating cost-cutting technical changes that themselves widen the market by making for reduced prices.<sup>157</sup>

### France and the United States

That the Regulationists' preoccupation with middle-range theory and the primacy of institutions actually does lead them to neglect the historically specific framework of social-property relations in which manufacturing develops and to misapprehend the effects of the capitalist institutions constituting their modes of regulation is evident in their practical application of their own concepts—specifically, in their rather astonishing notion that the economic histories of both France and the United States since roughly the second third of the nineteenth century can be grasped by the same schema of phases.<sup>158</sup> The economic trajectories of these two nations differed so dramatically during the specified period as to demand, on even the most superficial viewing, far more a theorization of their systematic divergence than a conceptualization of an imagined commonality. Shaped by radically different frameworks of social-property relations, not to mention divergent responses to the same international competitive

<sup>155</sup> See above, pp. 55–7.

<sup>156</sup> See above, pp. 57–61.

<sup>157</sup> See above, pp. 64–6.

<sup>158</sup> See Lipietz, 'Behind the Crisis', pp. 16–18ff.

environment, they can be interpreted as manifesting the same dynamics only in consequence of prior theoretical commitments.

In France, something resembling what the Regulationists refer to as a regime of extensive accumulation does seem to have prevailed through most of the nineteenth century. But there is little reason to believe that this had anything to do with the predominance of the capitalist institutions of the competitive mode of regulation. To an important degree, the framework for the development of French manufacturing was a system of social-property relations in much of agriculture that was still characterized by the preponderance of small peasant owner-producers significantly oriented to subsistence and semi-proletarianized peasants. This tended to limit the growth of agricultural productivity, to restrict the increase of the home market, and to bias manufacturing investment toward domestic industry based on semi-proletarianized peasants. Correlatively, for much of industry until fairly late in the nineteenth century, the manufacturing sector was only to a small degree penetrated by mechanized factories and heavily controlled by petty producers and small artisanal shops. The development of the French economy was, finally, further crucially cramped throughout the period by its inability to compete with the British hegemon on the world market.<sup>119</sup>

In the United States, in contrast, a spectacular process of intensive accumulation involved the rapid growth of fixed capital, labour productivity and a mass market for Department II consumption goods, at least from the time of the Civil War. This took place despite the predominance of what the Regulationists term the institutions of competitive regulation—in the absence, that is, of the institutions establishing the (Fordist) norm of working-class consumption, supposedly indispensable for viable intensive accumulation, and in the presence of a high level of inter-capitalist competition. The socioeconomic framework for manufacturing development was a fully capitalist system of social-property relations, above all in agriculture, which experienced especially dynamic growth and played an especially critical role. By the end of the century, it was the manufacturing sector located in Great Britain, much more than that in the United States, that had to be concerned about the distribution of international competitiveness.<sup>120</sup>

Paths of capital accumulation, it may be concluded, are simply incomprehensible apart from a specification of the broader system of social-property relations in which they are embedded. This is not only because those systems will define the range of economic strategies that individual economic actors can find it sensible to adopt; it is also because those systems constitute a field of natural selection for the adoption of institutions and heavily determine the effect of given institutions, once adopted, on capital accumulation. What this turns out to mean, in practice, is that paths of industrial development can

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<sup>119</sup> On the fundamental characteristics of French economic development during the nineteenth century, see F. Crouzet, 'French Economic Growth in the Nineteenth Century Reconsidered', *History*, LX, 1974; E. Berenson, *Peasant Religion and Left Wing Politics in France*, Princeton 1984, ch. 1.

<sup>120</sup> See above, pp. 66–74.



be expected to vary fundamentally according to whether they are framed by fully capitalist or non-capitalist agrarian social-property relations (and, if the latter, according to what type), *even in the presence of roughly similar capitalist institutions*. The contrasting evolutions, between 1850 and 1920, of manufacturing in Russia and Japan or the US South and the US North—or France and the United States—provide striking illustration of this point.

### Phases of National Capitalist Development? The World Economy

If one takes seriously the manner and degree to which, not only the broader framework of social-property relations, but also the nature of the world economy, shapes local processes of capital accumulation, the project of conceptualizing the history of capitalism as a progression of institutionally determined, nationally situated modes of development appears even more problematic. This is because the given international distribution of productive power will have a central role in determining what institutions are even viable within national economies at a given historical juncture, as well as what will be their effect on capital accumulation, since, unless they are shielded in some way, these institutions must directly respond to international competition. Focusing as they do on the regulation of national economies as a whole, Regulation theorists have not devoted a great deal of attention to institutional innovations that take place in a partial way, at the level of individual units of capital—the corporate form, vertical integration, horizontal integration, forms of merger of bank and manufacturing capital, and the like. But it does not seem controversial to say that such institutions have, in an important sense, succeeded in establishing themselves because, and worked their positive economic effects on the development of the productive forces to the degree that, they have made for increased competitiveness of the associated productive units—in competitive war with other productive units shaped by other institutional forms elsewhere. In practice, institutions emerge and reproduce themselves within local—regional or national—settings as a function, in important respects, of the institutions already extant on a world scale: they are constructed so as to emulate or surpass institutions in place elsewhere in promoting competitiveness in production. The same local institutional forms will constitute either stimuli or fetters for the development of the productive forces depending on the state of the distribution of productive power in the world economy as a whole—by which is simply meant the distribution among nations or regions of technological capacity embedded in fixed capital and the skilled labour and institutional ability to use it. The reason for this is that the capacity of institutions to further the development of the productive forces is strictly relative to their competitiveness, which obviously depends not only on their own absolute effectiveness but on institutionally based productive power elsewhere—witness the small, specialized firms and craft-controlled labour process emerging in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century; the modern vertically integrated corporation directly managing the labour process in relationship to industrial unions that developed in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States; and the state-aided *keiretsu* and single-firm unions of postwar Japan.

The upshot should be clear: the economic viability and effects of networks of local institutional forms (modes of regulation) will heavily depend on the stage of development of the world economy in its multiple relationships to the non-capitalist world. No doubt, *defined within that context*, institutions have proved, and will continue to prove, extremely important in affecting regional or national paths of growth of the productive forces, especially through their impact on manufacturing competitiveness: variations in institutional forms across nations and regions will, in other words, have a major part in determining the hierarchies of productivity and competitiveness among regions and nations. Yet, the implications of that conclusion are not entirely favourable to the Regulationists' project.

The point is that, while, from this vantage point, it is reasonable to expect that variations in the institutional framework, properly defined, will lead to measurable variations in rates of growth of the productive forces and relative competitiveness, it is also reasonable to expect that, within any given historical epoch in the history of capitalism, local, regional and national economies will differ very greatly from one another with respect to their institutional frameworks precisely because, as the Regulationists emphasize, these frameworks are the outcome of quite specific processes of historical evolution. But how, in that case, can what the Regulationists term modes of development—that is, epochal patterns of capital accumulation and structural crisis—be understood primarily in institutional terms? For, what is striking about the evolution of the world economy, at least since 1900, is that its constituent local, regional and national elements have, for the most part, simultaneously gone through the same grand economic phases. Despite the great differences in historically given systems of social-property relations, forms of government, economic institutions, and levels of technological development, essentially every part of the capitalist world took part, though not to the very same degree, in the unprecedented economic expansion of the epoch before World War I, was struck by the devastating interwar depression, partook of the great post-World War II boom, and has been weighed down by the structural crisis that began in the late 1960s. Despite the heterogeneous modes of regulation of its constituent parts, the world economy as a whole has possessed a certain homogeneity, indeed unity, in terms of its succession of phases of development. The world economy has, it seems, been able to impose *its* quite general logic, if not to precisely the same extent, on all of its component elements, despite their very particular modes of regulation. If we are to understand the complex operation of its parts, it is thus perhaps still indispensable to understand the functioning of the system as a whole, and this goes above all for the modes of development issuing in structural crisis that are at the core of the Regulationists' concern.

### The Wage-Labour Relation and Structural Crises

What gives the Regulationists' conceptualization of capitalist history its apparent comprehensiveness and powerful internal logic is their focus on the wage-labour relationship, specifically the capitalist labour process and the system of wage determination (or, more

broadly, income distribution).<sup>121</sup> In this regard, the notion of Taylorism–Fordism functions as the conceptual linchpin of the Regulationists' entire succession of phases: for in each mode of development, the institutional forms of the labour process—pre-Taylorist, then Taylorist–Fordist—and/or the wage relation—pre-Fordist, then Fordist—first facilitate then fetter the accumulation process, leading to structural crisis and class conflict. It was thus the establishment of the Taylorist–Fordist labour process during the first two decades of the twentieth century—itsself an outcome of class conflict that reversed a balance of forces previously favourable to labour—which made possible a breakthrough beyond the regime of extensive accumulation of the Regulationists' first mode of development to intensive accumulation. But the persistence of the institutions of competitive wage determination under the Regulationists' second mode of development, expressing the too great power of capital over labour, fettered intensive accumulation rooted in the Taylorist–Fordist labour process and led to the structural crisis of underconsumption and the political conflicts of the interwar period. It was then the establishment of the Fordist mode of consumption, manifesting a class compromise that emerged from the sociopolitical conflicts of the thirties and forties, that allowed for the full flowering of the Taylorist–Fordist labour process and intensive accumulation during the postwar boom, the Regulationists' third mode of development. However, the Taylorist–Fordist labour process, expressing the strength of labour vis-à-vis capital,<sup>122</sup> ultimately came to fetter the growth of the productive forces and issued in a new structural crisis of productivity growth from the late sixties onwards. It will, finally, be a newly constructed labour process, beyond Taylorism–Fordism, built upon a new class compromise, that will make possible an exit from the current economic impasse, presumably a new, post-Fordist fourth mode of development.

It has been the burden of our essay that each of the foregoing propositions—deriving from the Regulationists' one-sided concentration upon the historically specific institutions of wage-labour and associated balances of class power, to the neglect of the constraints imposed by capitalist social-property relations in general, especially inter-capitalist competition—flies in the face of the fundamental realities of capitalist development. As a result, the whole notion of Fordism, in both its supply-side and its demand-side aspects, is theoretically incoherent and empirically irrelevant, and provides misleading perspectives on the nature of capitalist crises, past and present, on the historical role of class power and politics in precipitating and resolving capitalist crises, and on contemporary policy options. To begin with: if the Regulationists are correct, the supply-side breakthrough to Taylorism–Fordism on the shopfloor (itself perhaps dependent on an accompanying move to intra-capitalist organization on the basis of oligopoly) was the *sine qua non* for the breakthrough beyond the Regulationists' first mode of development to accumulation predominantly on the basis of relative surplus-value, that is, intensive accumulation. But, if this were so, we would have to accept the paradoxical conclusion

<sup>121</sup> See above, p. 48.

<sup>122</sup> Lipietz, 'Behind the Crisis', p. 13.

that fully developed capitalism—before the Taylorist–Fordist revolution at the level of the labour process (and the transcendence of fully fledged inter-capitalist competition)—was incapable of developing, did not in fact historically develop, by way of capital accumulation based on relative surplus-value. We would also have to believe that, for a whole long epoch, the sheer class power of labour was sufficient to insure such a degree of craft control over the labour process as to fetter technical change. In reality, however, the capitalist labour process cannot function as an economy-wide institutional constraint dictating a whole regime of accumulation and mode of development; on the contrary, the labour process is itself regularly (though not continuously) transformed in consequence of capital accumulation, as technical change takes place under the impact of inter-capitalist competition, making for the revolutionizing of the productive forces and the growth of relative surplus-value.

In the Regulationists' second mode of development, competitive wage regulation is supposed to have fettered intensive accumulation by making for insufficient demand and the uneven development of Department I, thereby precipitating structural crisis. Were this so, we would have to reach the conclusion that capitalism, inherently and through most of its history, confronts a structural crisis of underconsumption. But we have tried to show that the Regulationists' underlying underconsumptionist theory is flawed, as is clear from the long history of capitalist development on the basis of relative surplus-value in the absence of Fordist institutions of mass consumption, notably in the United States, as well as from statistical material on the interwar crisis.

As to the Regulationists' third mode of development: the establishment of Fordist institutions of mass consumption, especially collective bargaining, was supposed to have made for the great post-World War II boom. But if the source of the crisis of the 1930s was not underconsumption, why should Fordist consumption have constituted its cure? Empirically, it is by no means clear that institutions were ever established in the United States that ensured, via collective bargaining, an economy-wide 'sharing out' of productivity gains to labour, and it is certain that in Japan, the nation which experienced the most successful postwar growth, there were neither such institutions, nor such redistribution.<sup>23</sup> In fact the Regulationists, in all their writings, offer no *other* systemic contradiction, or source of capitalist crisis, except 'the uneven development of Department I' and underconsumption. The Fordist/Keynesian class-compromise might even be thought to have solved capitalism's problems... were it not for the remaining difficulty in developing the productive forces that showed up with the current crisis.<sup>24</sup>

Turning now to the Regulationists' analysis of the roots of the current economic crisis, these are supposed to be found in the 'exhaustion of

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<sup>23</sup> See above, pp. 92–6. This is not, of course, to deny that us and Japanese workers benefited from productivity gains, simply that Fordist institutions ensured that wage growth kept up with productivity increase.

<sup>24</sup> The Regulationists do find a further source of crisis in the international, that is, multistate, organization (or lack thereof) of the world economy.

the Taylorist-Fordist labour process'. But this proposition suffers from the same fundamental defect that we saw in the Regulationist account of earlier structural crises: namely, that the form of labour process—functioning in analogy with the social-relations-of-production concept in the Marxian theory of modes of production—acts (along with institutions distributing income) as the chief facilitator and, ultimately, the primary fetter on the growth of the productive forces. Thus, from a theoretical standpoint, we have asserted that the Regulationists' conception tends: (i) misleadingly to reduce technical advance to the appropriation by capital of workers' shopfloor knowledge, control and energy; (ii) to mislocate the primary source, indeed meaning, of technical change in the struggle for class power, especially at the point of production; and (iii) implicitly to misattribute to capitalist-imposed technical change a unilateral or universal tendency to deskilling, playing down the requirement of new skills that often come with technical change. As a result, it vastly understates the central role played by the growth of technical and scientific understanding beyond the labour process, neglects the generalized, if not continuous, tendency to the introduction of more efficient (increased output per given input) techniques under the pressure of competition, and fails adequately to acknowledge the countertendency to reskilling resulting from technical change that is the consequence of capitalists' desire to adopt the most profitable technique, virtually irrespective of skill content.<sup>125</sup> In particular, although we would not deny that workers' separation from control over and knowledge of production, with their consequent alienation and resistance, is a factor that affects the growth of the productive forces, we would certainly dispute the Regulationist contention that this separation constituted a barrier to technical advance sufficient to precipitate a decline in productivity growth capable of bringing on the current crisis of capitalism. Indeed, at least in the case of the United States, which experienced the economic downturn earliest and perhaps most profoundly among the OECD nations, there was no crisis of manufacturing productivity at the time of the initial decline in the rate of profit.

## Politics

Since the Regulationists find the ultimate source of the current crisis in 'the crisis of "informal involvement" ' of workers in production—the failure to secure their conscious, 'formal' commitment—it follows that Lipietz should propose an 'anti-Taylorian revolution' as the way out. This would bring into being a new class compromise that would secure, simultaneously, the socio-technical requirements for transcending the productivity crisis and the economic and political requirements for society-wide consent and stability. Workers would offer increased involvement in, and commitment to, improving production on the basis of the introduction of work teams; capitalists would provide guarantees of employment, enriched jobs, and the further share-out of the gains from increased productivity growth. Such an agreement would, the Regulationists believe, constitute a positive-sum solution, in which both labour and capital would benefit from a faster growing pie.

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<sup>125</sup> See above, pp. 98–102.

This proposal instantiates the Regulationists' more general idea that the resolution of secular capitalist crises requires a 'great compromise' among the different social classes, by which a 'pattern of development' is broadly accepted as the 'economic basis for what could be considered the best thing humankind may expect from economic activity [at that historical juncture] and defended from the right and the left.' It is analogous to the Regulationists' understanding of the foundations for the postwar boom as constituted by a Rooseveltian or social-democratic compromise, in which capitalists acceded to the distribution to workers of wage gains in line with productivity increase, as well as the consolidation of the welfare state, and secured, as a result, the stable demand required to ward off crisis and to create a favourable environment for massive capital investment.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, in light especially of our argument that the crisis of the 1930s was not a crisis of underconsumption, it would seem to us to make better sense to say the converse: namely, that the onset and perpetuation of the boom provided the indispensable condition for the Rooseveltian or social-democratic compromise, which could not be forged or stabilized until after the crisis had been transcended. By the same token, because the Regulationists' diagnosis of the current crisis is faulty, Lipietz's prescription will not work, and the proposed political bargain is therefore unviable.

The fundamental point, as we have tried to show, is that the source of the current crisis is not a problem of productivity growth: a decline in productivity increase did not bring on the crisis, so an improved rate of productivity increase cannot restore aggregate profitability and prosperity. Even if workers' involvement were increased throughout the capitalist economy leading to increased productivity growth, capitalists, facing continuing pressure on their profits, could not, even if they wished to, viably promise workers, in exchange for involvement, secure employment and enriched jobs, or even a share of the returns from productivity growth. This is not to deny, of course, that firms that become relatively more productive than the average in their line (however they do so) will be relatively better able to insure their workers' jobs. So will firms or units at the 'core' of an industry, where work has been increasingly contracted out, or in other ways peripheralized, to firms with increasingly insecure (and otherwise worse-off) workers. But in such cases, one group of workers is simply benefiting at the expense of another, within the context—so long as the crisis of profitability continues—of generalized, on average, deterioration.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> 'New Technologies, New Modes of Regulation: Some Spatial Implications', *Security and Space*, vi, 1988, p. 271; Lipietz, 'An Alternative Design for the Twenty-First Century', pp. 18–21 (quotation from p. 19). Cf. Lipietz, 'Fallacies and Open Issues About Post-Fordism', p. 15. The idea of class compromise as basis for economic prosperity appears to correspond to the Regulationist notion that the great crises have been explicable, from one standpoint, as a consequence of an imbalance of class power, with capital 'too strong' in the 1920s and labour 'too strong' in the 1960s.

<sup>27</sup> It should also be pointed out that a number of manufacturing firms, notably within the automobile industry, have been able to grant formal limits on lay-offs by means of securing a high rate of attrition through other mechanisms, such as retirement, workers leaving the job because the work has become too difficult, dismissals for cause, and the like.

In passing, it should be noted that Lipietz believes that there is a further, derivative

Perhaps equally to the point, it is far from clear that capital today requires a class compromise of the sort mooted by the Regulation School to continue to secure sufficient, or even significantly to increase, productivity growth. The Regulationists believe that securing consciously organized workers' commitment (as opposed to the 'informed involvement' of the past) is the key to transcending the productivity impasse. But they also contend that 'an involved working class is a working class whose know-how is accumulated for the benefit both of firms and of workers', and that this is impossible if there is no 'community of destiny between firms and their workers,' for '[n]o worker would exercise his or her cooperative spirit in search of gains in productivity entailing his or her own redundancy.'<sup>128</sup> In this context, the Regulationists describe the United States as having adopted a 'flexible liberal', as opposed to a 'negotiated involvement' response to the productivity crisis, seeking radically to cut labour costs by eliminating job security, 'by out-sourcing, by transferring production to the Third World and increasing the level of automation', rather than pursuing 'a new "social contract"', in which wage-earners were called upon to join 'the battle for quality and productivity'.<sup>129</sup> The fact remains, however, that, despite their apparent disdain for creating a 'community of destiny' between themselves and their employees, US manufacturing firms have during the period of secular crisis been able to increase productivity at a higher rate than at any other time during the postwar period. Over the period 1979–89, US firms in the manufacturing sector were able to raise *labour* productivity an average of 3.6 per cent per annum (compared to 2.9 per cent per annum between 1948 and 1973) and *total factor* productivity an average of 2.9 per cent per annum (compared to 2.1 per cent per annum between 1948 and 1973). This has not prevented their taking advantage of relatively high levels of unemployment and a declining number of decent-paying jobs, so as to secure the *reduction* of hourly real wages by about 15 per cent between 1973 and the present.<sup>130</sup> The point is that the dichotomy between 'flexible liberal' and team/cooperative as distinct and competing socio-technical forms is, to a great degree, a false one. The sort of cooperation and teamwork needed successfully to implement new technologies today can, at least to an important extent, be secured through the incentives provided by workers' belief that they must make their firms competitive in order to keep them in business (or they will lose their jobs), as well as the sanctions of a loose and deteriorating labour market.

The Regulationists may overestimate the degree to which capital must

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<sup>127</sup> (*cont.*)

but nonetheless central, source of the crisis, namely, inadequate demand, resulting from the cuts in wages and social spending implemented in response to the initial decline in profitability resulting from the productivity crisis. Lipietz, 'New Technologies, New Modes of Regulation', p. 267; 'The Debt Problem, European Integration and the New Phase of World Crisis', *NLR* November–December 1989, p. 38; 'An Alternative Design for the Twenty-First Century', p. 9.

<sup>128</sup> Lipietz, 'New Technologies, New Modes of Regulation', p. 271, Lipietz, 'An Alternative Design for the Twenty-First Century', p. 19.

<sup>129</sup> Lipietz, 'The Debt Problem', p. 40.

<sup>130</sup> Figures on productivity are from US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *News*, 26 March 1991.

enter into genuinely cooperative arrangements with labour in part because they perhaps overrate the degree to which the new, team-centered, Japanese-style production techniques actually raise skills and thereby bring about increased dependence of employers on workers in the productive process. Whatever else it offers, team or 'lean' production does little or nothing to increase the level of workers' skill, let alone make them into craftspeople. Indeed, far from the anti-Taylorian revolution that Lipietz envisions, the foundation for the productivity gains secured on the shop floor through team or lean production is hyperTaylorization—the super-deskilling of jobs by means of their breakdown into their simplest possible components (fittingly called 'details' by the Japanese). This is achieved through what has been illuminatingly termed 'management by stress', in which the goal is to remove, to the greatest extent possible, not only all 'indirect' and 'specialist' labour coming from off the line (maintenance, repair, housekeeping, quality checking, and the like), as well as all excess materials at work stations, but also to make sure all workers are labouring throughout the entire time the work is at their station. Initially, teams of managers and group leaders actually work on each job and provide, from above, a highly detailed specification of its content, the details composing it. The workers themselves then carry through their tasks under conditions in which, to the greatest extent possible, all 'safety nets' in the form of surplus materials and adjunct workers have been removed. Workers and their teams are not allowed to let defects pass, to be dealt with at the end of the line, but are required to take responsibility for quality control by fixing each one at the time it is discovered and, in particular, by tracing the problem back to its source. In this situation, workers, as well as managers, are able to discover which tasks need more (or less) time and which jobs need to be redesigned, so that the labour force can be allocated in the most efficient possible manner.<sup>131</sup>

It is because workers themselves in this way make an independent contribution to the rationalization of work that they can rightly be said to be using their talents for increasing productivity. It is because jobs have been so highly simplified that workers can be asked to master all, or almost all, of the jobs done by the members of the team. This does make for greater flexibility and higher quality, as well as for the 'filling of the pores' of the working day, bringing about increased output both by raising efficiency and intensifying effort per unit time. But, the so-called polyvalence that is achieved does not bring much increase of workers' skill, except in a highly attenuated sense of the

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<sup>131</sup> For an excellent account of the Japanese-style labour process and team production, on which we have heavily relied, see the very important study by Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter, *Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept* (A Labor Notes Book), Boston 1988, esp. ch. 3. See also J.P. Womack, D.T. Jones, and D. Roos, *The Machine that Changed the World*, New York 1990, esp. chs 3 and 4. These two studies, despite their very different attitudes toward team or lean production, offer very similar, mutually corroborating accounts of just what is involved in it. It should be made clear that we are not denying that certain institutions—lifetime employment, single firm unions—can provide a more favourable environment for investment in skills and that such investment has had important effects on productivity growth in, say, Japan. We are simply saying that Japanese-style team or lean production can achieve important output gains, without itself bringing or requiring much reskilling.



term. Nor do workers secure increased control: as time goes on, their jobs are ever more fully defined from above to the smallest detail by engineers and managers, and they retain the initiative primarily in helping the company further identify slack and waste in the system. At the same time, precisely because team or lean production does make for the hyper-simplification of tasks, it is no way instantiates an ostensible choice of technique embodying higher skill (human capital) but lower fixed capital, as Lipietz suggests. On the contrary, as has been very well evidenced, the implementation of 'team' or 'lean' production, like analogous processes of breakup and simplification of tasks historically, provides highly favourable conditions for the introduction of the highest levels of automation and new technology. It should not be surprising that, given the recent economy-wide stagnation, to the extent that this has issued in increased productivity, the outcome has been a massive reduction in jobs and thus even greater insecurity for US automobile workers.<sup>132</sup>

In this situation of ongoing economic crisis, for workers further to involve themselves in 'the team concept' is merely to tie their fortunes ever more closely to 'their own' firms, to set themselves ever more directly against their fellow workers across the industry, and to undermine what is left of their collective union power. If the crisis deepens, no amount of goodwill on the part of their employers will save their jobs. And to the extent they have 'involved' themselves with their own companies, to that extent they will destroy their own ability to defend their condition.

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<sup>132</sup> For the Regulationists' idea that the choice today is between (less effective) capital intensive and (more effective) labour intensive production, see Lipietz, 'New Technologies, New Modes of Regulation', pp. 268–9. On team or lean production and automation and robotization, see Womack et al., *The Machines that Changed the World*, pp. 94, 102. These authors explicitly (and unfavourably) contrast the revival of what they call 'neocraftsmanship' in Swedish Volvo plants with Japanese team or lean production (pp 101–2).

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It is well known that Japan has in the past decade developed into an economic superpower—the world's greatest asset country, with the biggest per-capita GNP, the biggest aid budgets, home to all ten of the world's biggest banks and many of its biggest corporations, the base for 15 per cent of the world's economic activity, the centre of the most dynamic sector of the world trading system, whose land value is estimated at four times that of the United States, whose resource flows help keep the US dollar afloat, whose factories supply quality goods to the world, and whose construction companies are engaged in huge infrastructural projects across the globe.<sup>1</sup>

From this it is common to assume that Japan is resoundingly successful, the very model of success, and that its people are correspondingly wealthy and enjoying the fruits of that success. It is true that consumer income has risen to the point that sixty million cars clog the highways; one third of the world's tuna catch and two fifths of its shrimps pass through Japanese stomachs; one quarter of the world's tropical timber is imported.<sup>2</sup> But gourmet foods, overseas travel, cars and electronic gadgetry do not make up for housing inadequacy, lack of basic amenities such as sewerage, too few public parks and spaces, lack of time to do one's own thing. High general levels of dissatisfaction with living conditions raise serious questions. On comparative tables Japan matches or surpasses the advanced capitalist countries of Europe and North America only in per-capita income, television sets and electronic equipment.<sup>3</sup> Nomura Research Institute reckons that even by 1995 Japan will still be well behind countries like the US and (West) Germany in terms of living standards.<sup>4</sup> In December 1990 it was reported that the average price of a 57-square-metre apartment in Tokyo was 80 million yen, or twelve times the average Tokyo resident's annual income, and that metropolitan housing was

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<sup>1</sup> For other recent analyses of the significance of Japan's rise, see my 'Pacific Dreamtime and Japan's New Millennialism', *Australasian Outlook*, vol. 43, no. 2, August 1989, pp. 64–73; and 'Capitalism Triumphant? The Evidence from "Number One"', *Kyoto Journal*, Spring 1990, pp. 4–10.

<sup>2</sup> Murai Yoshinori, 'Hakyoku ni maru kaihansushugi to kajo shohi' (Developmentalism and overconsumption reach catastrophe proportions), *Kokusai seminar*, no. 422, 1990, pp. 12–16, and *Ebi to Nihonjin* (Shrimps and the Japanese), Iwanami 1988.

<sup>3</sup> 'Nichubei kankai, 6', (Japan-US Relations, part 6), *Asahi shimbun*, 29 March 1990, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Japan rates 58 to (West) Germany's 79, the USA's 80, the UK's 53; quoted in Takagake Yuji, 'En pawa no seijigaku' (The Politics of Yen Power), *Asahi Kizai*, September 1989, pp. 80–98, p. 94.

forty times oversubscribed.<sup>5</sup> Corporate prosperity has reached unparalleled heights while social poverty is real and widespread. Capitalism has always developed unevenly, but at a time when its productive capacity excites unalloyed admiration worldwide these contradictions deserve close attention.

Japan has steered its economic course with remarkable agility through the oil shocks and consequent economic restructuring of the past two decades. It has apparently led the way in the transition from a base in the 'modern' industries characterized by the 'heavy, thick, long and big' (*ju-ko-cho-dai*) industries of steel, ships, petrochemicals, and so forth, to the 'postmodern' or information-society industries characterized by the 'light, thin, short and small' (*kei-baku-tan-sbo*) of the high-technology and service sector. It is the particular recent shift into leisure industries, and its broader implications for economic and social policy, that are addressed in this paper. In short, is the massive effort to increase the range and qualities of recreational facilities available in Japan a sign that the good life is beginning to dawn for its citizens? Or is it merely an expression of that characteristically post-modern game, the casino, which is non-productive of social wealth, addictive, has many losers, and offers little solace even for its winners?

This article is based partly on an extensive study of regional development, planning, the impact of economic restructuring on remote local communities, and on the environment, undertaken between December 1989 and January 1990, which took me from sub-tropical Ishigaki island in the south to the farthest reaches of Hokkaido. I have also made use of the growing Japanese literature on these subjects, and some excellent documentary film material, virtually all in Japanese.<sup>6</sup>

The first paradox is that the massive increase in physical amenities is not accompanied by any increase in the time available for people to enjoy them. The leisure market was about 52 million million yen in 1985 and set to double by the turn of the century, but at the same time the average Japanese work year remains at 2,168 hours, virtually unchanged from the mid 1970s—between 200 and 500 hours more than elsewhere in the industrialized world and roughly on a par with Europe during the period of economic recovery in the early 1950s.<sup>7</sup> Fewer than 20 per cent of Japanese workers enjoy a two-day weekend; overtime, at an average of 190 hours per year, has *increased* since 1986 and annual paid leave in Japan amounts on average to 9 days,

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Waley, 'Rabbit hutch life holds seeds of social fracture', *Japan Times*, 9 December 1990.

<sup>6</sup> The following have been most helpful: *Gobbaiz Jichiban*, (Monthly local government), vol. 31, no. 361, October 1989, 'Kizutsuku nihon retto' (Wounded Japanese archipelago); Sato Makoto and NHK 'Ohayo janaru shusaihan', *Dokuyumento-rizumu* (Resorts-Documentation), Nihon hyoronsha 1989; Sato Makoto, *Rizotto retto* (Resort archipelago), Iwanami shinsho 1990; Yamada Kunihiro, *Gorofayo bakuhatsu* (Golf-Ruin of the Country), Shinhyoron 1989, and in English, 'The Triple Evil of Golf Courses', *Japan Quarterly*, July–September 1990, pp. 291–7; Nagao Kyodokumiai, vol. 426, August 1990, special issue on 'Do suru: "Rizotto kaihatsu"' (What is to be done about resort development?). Also in audio-visual materials: NHK Kyushu supeshiaru, 'Kizureyuku rakoen-Okinawa no shizen wa ima' (Paradise being destroyed—The present situation of nature in Okinawa), August 1989; and NHK Dokuyumento supeshiaru, *Rizotto retto* (Resort archipelago), July 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Sato, *Rizotto retto*, p. 156 (1989 figures).

as against 19 in the US, 24 in the UK, 26 in France and 29 in (West) Germany.<sup>8</sup>

Although availability of leisure time seems scarcely to match that of facilities, the need for recreation seems clear, not only on the basis of reward for contribution to achievement but evidently also on the basis of physical need, since the Welfare Ministry figures show an eightfold increase in the general rate of ill health in the community between 1955 and 1985, with high blood pressure and nervous disorders marked by much greater increases.<sup>9</sup> Sudden death from overwork (*karoshi*) has become a widely noted social phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that 58.5 per cent of people polled by the Economic Planning Agency in 1988 should say that their level of leisure, or time and space to do their own thing (*yutori*), was inadequate.<sup>11</sup>

Corporate Japan has recognized the existence of the problem and devised a battery of high-tech and ingenious solutions to stress, other, that is, than what might be thought the obvious—reduction in working hours, decentralization of population, and provision of facilities for cheap relaxation in natural surroundings. They include special kinds of chewing gum, meditation chambers (with one hundred 'PSY Brain Mind Gym Relaxation Salons' to open across the country in 1990), womb-like 'Refresh Capsules', equipped with tape facilities which allow one to be completely immersed in the environment of 'murmuring brooks, singing birds, and gently breaking waves'—the environment, in other words, that is rarely experienced in reality.<sup>12</sup>

### The Resort Boom

One would like to think the Comprehensive Resort Region Provision Law, commonly known just as the 'Resort Law',<sup>13</sup> which passed the Diet in 1987, was part of a serious attempt to address the social need for rest, recuperation and return to nature, but the evidence suggests otherwise. The legislation specified reliance on 'utilizing the abilities of private entrepreneurs' to ensure the comprehensive provision of sporting, recreational, educational and cultural activities in 'areas possessing good natural conditions'. It had an immediate and remarkable effect. Towns, villages and prefectures throughout the country entered into such intense competition to be designated as 'resort' areas that as of December 1989 19.2 per cent of the entire land area of Japan was involved. 646 projects had reached the 'works' stage by then, with a further 205 at the planning level.<sup>14</sup> This means that much more of Japan's land area is to be devoted to 'resort' activities (7.25 million hectares) than to agriculture (5.5 million hectares).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Wataai Yumi, '90 nendai no yoka ichibu' (The Leisure Market of the 1990s), *Nihon Keizai shimbun*, 5 July 1990, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> From 37.9 per thousand in 1955 to 145.2 per thousand in 1985. Sato, *Rizotto ruto*, p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> Teruoka Itsuko, *Yatahasu to wa nanika* (What is affluence?), Iwanami 1989, p. 142ff. (Teruoka also includes an excellent general discussion of the phenomenon of stress.)

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Sato, *Rizotto ruto*, p. 157.

<sup>12</sup> J. Walsh and Mizuko Toyoshima, 'All in Your Mind', *Look Japan*, April 1990, pp. 30–31.

<sup>13</sup> 'Sogo hoyo chi-iki seibi ho' in Japanese Sogo.

<sup>14</sup> Sato, *Rizotto ruto*, p. 98 (slightly different figures in NHK Dokyumento supeshiaru).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

Ski resorts, golf courses and marinas sprout like autumn mushrooms. They rejoice in suggestive names such as Mie Sunbelt Zone, Aizu Fresh Resort, Snow and Green My Life Resort Niigata, Gunma Refresh My Life Resort, Chichibu Resort, 40° Longitude Seasonal Resort Akita, Nagasaki Exotic Resort, and so on. For the island of Kyushu, for example, 26.7 per cent of the land has been incorporated in plans for 135 resorts with an estimated investment of about 300 thousand million yen, including 100 golf courses and 10 Disneyland-type 'space-world' theme parks.<sup>16</sup> As for Okinawa, the poorest prefecture in Japan, all seventy of its islands have been declared a 'Tropical Resort'. Efforts are underway to increase the current 2.4 million annual tourist intake to 'Hawaiian' levels of about 6 million by the end of the century.<sup>17</sup>

Golf is a quintessential resort activity. The *Asahi* estimate in March 1990 was that Japan had 1,700 golf courses in existence, 325 under construction, 983 at the planning stage, and many more under consideration. The number planned or under construction had doubled during 1989. Japan, which had a mere 100 courses in 1955, will, when the 2,085 courses in existence or under construction are completed, have nearly 170,000 hectares, or 0.54 per cent of its narrow, mountainous lands devoted to golf.<sup>18</sup> This frenzied activity seems an ironic response to the need for relaxation and leisure. There is no real parallel for the phenomenon in other advanced industrial countries, although the forces driving it in Japan are now also expanding rapidly throughout the Pacific region. The economic, social and environmental implications are worthy of attention.

How do golf courses get built? Capital costs for an 18-hole course in the Osaka vicinity are estimated to be about 200 thousand million yen, so if one thousand members can be subscribed at an average of 40 million yen there is already a 100 per cent profit. Such profit is often realized before the course even opens. Club memberships are tradable commodities whose value has rocketed in recent years, appreciating by about 400 per cent between 1982 and 1989, and by an additional 190 per cent during 1989.<sup>19</sup> A course under construction in Chiba prefecture, just outside Tokyo in the so-called 'Golf Course Ginza' area, has a capital cost of 7 thousand million yen. The company concerned plans to put up 80 million yen of its own money and to enrol 1,400 members. This enrolment is done in several stages, membership being offered first to a limited group of several hundred at a special charter rate of about 3 million yen and gradually increasing through subsequent tranches to about 10 million yen. In this case, and if all goes well, the initial investment of 80 million yen yields a return of 3 thousand million yen. Since the average membership on the Osaka exchange is around 40 million yen, or four times what the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4. For a recent table of projects, see also Honma Yoshito, 'Ima mata susumu retto kaizo' (Remodelling the Japanese archipelago under way again), *Sekai*, June 1990, pp. 118-30, p. 121.

<sup>17</sup> *Sekai*, June 1990, p. 223 (quoting *Ryukyus shunpo*).

<sup>18</sup> 'Gorufu retto—jichitu no shisei minasoshi' (Golf archipelago—Local Governments Reconsidering Position), *Asahi shimbun*, 24 March 1990.

<sup>19</sup> Sato, *Rettō retto*, p. 132; also NHK Dokyumento supeshiaru.

last ones in this venture had to pay, no one is likely to complain. Nowadays million-dollar-membership country clubs (*okukuan*) proliferate, and prices can range up to 400 million yen-plus for those who aspire to the exclusive.<sup>20</sup> One of the many attractive features of the golf-club corporate assets deriving from membership fees is that, technically, such monies are regarded as merely temporarily deposited funds, and are therefore not taxable.<sup>21</sup> A similar analysis can be made for ski-course developments. Currently there are between six and seven hundred of these, also expanding rapidly.<sup>22</sup>

The economic and social consequences of this type of development may be serious, particularly in terms of the in-built potential for corruption. The politicians, bureaucrats, and local or national men of power and influence who are enrolled as charter members of a country club at highly discounted rates have a vested interest in seeing that the permits for fast-track construction are secured and local opposition defeated. The proliferation of courses, with its attendant inflationary spiral, seems destined to continue. Politicians, who need a million dollars-odd a year to run their political machines, are enthusiastic about their new milch-cow, especially since the Supreme Court in 1982 held that club memberships were not valuable securities, so that there can be no issue of bribery involved.<sup>23</sup> The memberships are traded, and are used as collateral for bank loans, so the Supreme Court was taking a very narrow view. If the currently projected 1,500 courses were to go ahead, each with two to three hundred 'charter' members, the web of vested interest, whether or not technically one of corruption, is spun over an influential section of the population, perhaps 300,000 people.

In short, the golfing phenomenon is more supply-side driven than it is in response to increased demand (although that too has increased, and there were an estimated ten million players as of the end of 1988).<sup>24</sup> And it is from the castles of money built around the redoubts of golf in Japan that much of the expansion into the tourism and resort industries around the Pacific rim, especially Queensland, is financed. By the end of 1989 there were about one hundred overseas Japanese courses, as well as the many hotels and other resorts.<sup>25</sup> The Japanese offer, several years ago, to buy all the private courses in the Sydney area becomes understandable against this background.<sup>26</sup>

### Environmental Impact

In the long run, however, it is the environmental impact of the current

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<sup>20</sup> Sato, *Rizoto raito*, p. 131, also NHK Dokyumento supeshiaru. Both sources allude also to a development by Kumagai-gumi on the Boso peninsula (Chiba prefecture) where a clear profit of 17.3 thousand million yen is anticipated for a zero initial capital outlay.

<sup>21</sup> Sato, *Rizoto raito*, p. 125.

<sup>22</sup> 'Nihon seitaru gakkai rizoto ni keisho' (Japan Ecological Association's warning on resorts), *Ashihara*, 13 December 1989, p. 12; also various articles by Honda Katsuchi in *Asahi jomaru*, April and May 1990.

<sup>23</sup> Yamada, 'The Triple Evil of Golf Courses', p. 295.

<sup>24</sup> 'Rizoto kaihan' (Resort development), *Nihon keizai shinbun*, 14 January 1990.

<sup>25</sup> Sato, *Rizoto raito*, p. 132.

<sup>26</sup> Abe David and Ted Wheelwright, *The Third Wave: Asian Capitalism and Australia*, Sydney 1989, p. 153 (quoting from the *Daily Mirror* of 13 January 1989).

golf boom that may be the most serious factor. Economic circumstances may cause many of the rash of resorts currently being built to collapse, sooner or later, but the swathes of the Japanese countryside now being cleared for development will not quickly recover. A golf-course development needs a site of about 100 hectares, preferably in undulating countryside with good access to major population centres. There are no such sites left free of housing or agricultural development in Japan. Consequently, as Kunihiro Yamada describes it, 'much golf course development has occurred in forested areas at the foot of mountains. Developers clear-cut the forests and use bulldozers to level off hilltops and fill in valleys. In this way, golf course construction is tantamount to the destruction of forests, pure and simple. Even though 67 per cent of Japan's total land area is covered by forests, its forest products self-sufficiency rate has fallen to only 30 per cent.'<sup>27</sup>

However, the passage of the 'Resort Law' was marked by a political and bureaucratic consensus at the highest level. In its wake, therefore, a series of administrative measures, and some other new laws, have been adopted to ease the restrictions on the use of agricultural or national-park, forest, water-catchment or other semi-public lands for resort purposes.<sup>28</sup> Tax breaks are generous, various financially attractive packages of incentives are offered, and administrative procedures are simplified. Not only is the area of land involved far greater than during the ill-famed 'Remodelling The Japanese Archipelago' years of the Tanaka government in the mid seventies, but legal and administrative measures then adopted to protect national parks and the mountain and coastal environment have been watered down or abandoned in the name of an officially promoted 'Human Green Plan'.

The 'green' quality of the mountain and coastal resorts promoted under this scheme is deceptive. In the case of each golf course, it is achieved by the application of three to four tons per year of herbicides, germicides, pesticides, colouring agents, organic chlorine and other fertilizers, including chemicals that are carcinogenic or cause various health abnormalities.<sup>29</sup> The Naoki Prize-winning author, Osamu Takahashi, describes the hills of Chiba prefecture over which one flies on approach to Narita Airport as resembling defoliated Vietnam, and likely to take as long to recover.<sup>30</sup> This rich brew, three times the intensity of what the most chemically minded farmer would apply to tomatoes, ultimately drains off into rivers, ponds, swamps, lakes or sea.<sup>31</sup> The Ministry of Health has found 950 places where the quality or quantity of water has been adversely affected by golf development.<sup>32</sup> Widespread damage to animal, bird, insect, marine and human life has been reported, and an environmental citizens' movement is

<sup>27</sup> Yamada, 'The Triple Evil of Golf Courses', p. 292.

<sup>28</sup> Sato, *Rizotto ratta*, pp. 163-4, NHK Dokumento supeshiaru; Fujiwara Makoto, 'Kansure naki shizen hakai e no michi' (The path to unprecedented destruction of nature), *Sekai*, June 1990, pp. 131-43.

<sup>29</sup> Yamada, 'The Triple Evil of Golf Courses', p. 292; also *Gorufujo bakukatsu*, passim.

<sup>30</sup> See 'Rizotto tokushu' (Special issue on resorts), *Sekai*, June 1990, p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> Tsukaisure okoku (6) noyaku o nagasu gorufujo' (Throwaway kingdom, part 6, golf courses emitting agricultural chemicals), *Asahi shinbun*, 20 December 1989, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Asahi shinbun*, 24 March 1990.



being organized to oppose it. Though Okinawa was only returned to Japanese jurisdiction in 1972, already over 80 per cent of its coral is dead, its best beaches privatized, and its inshore fishermen reporting drastically reduced catches.<sup>33</sup> To meet the anticipated demand for water for tourist development to come, all the rivers of Okinawa must be dammed, which will wreak havoc on their upstream ecology and hasten the silting of their mouths.<sup>34</sup> The Japan Ecological Association has expressed profound concern at the damage being done to nature in the name of leisure, particularly at the encroachment on national parks. The denuding and remoulding of mountains for ski purposes also causes landslides, and the Association estimated that a single development might be responsible for the loss of the equivalent of between one and two hundred ten-ton dump-truck loads of soil into surrounding rivers in a year.<sup>35</sup> The case of a small island such as Awajishima, where developers plan to add ten new golf courses to the existing two, is indicative of the extraordinary dimensions of the problem.<sup>36</sup>

When one realizes that 'development' in Japan has—according to the Environment Agency—brought 628 of Japan's wildlife species and 899 of its wild plants to the brink of extinction, the potentially catastrophic consequences of current policies may be appreciated. Among the threatened fauna are the Satsuki trout of the Nagara River, the Iriomote wildcat of Okinawa, the crested ibis of Sado Island, the mud-skipper (or *matsugoro*) of Ariake Bay, the striped owl, the Japanese otter and the snow goose; among threatened flora are the fringed orchid and the primrose.<sup>37</sup>

### Land Price Inflation

The process nevertheless proceeds with apparently inexorable force, driven by complex economic motivations. The problem of land-price inflation is central. Though Japan's commodity-price inflation level is among the lowest of industrial countries, the rate of land-price inflation has no contemporary (and perhaps no historical) precedent. It may be argued that Japan operates a dual currency system: the yen on the one hand, and 'land currency' (*doka*) which is linked to the real-estate market and to political interests, the relationship between the two being articulated by bank credit issued against land or stock securities.<sup>38</sup> The scale of inflation of Japan's land and stock values over the past twenty years is remarkable.

Land-price inflation far exceeds growth rates in the 'real' economy, while at the same time driving it. Through the 1970s, Japan's GNP increased fivefold but its land assets tenfold, a disproportion that has continued to widen.<sup>39</sup> The real-estate industry, which employs about 790,000 people, generates an operating surplus almost on a par with

<sup>33</sup> NHK Dokyumento *supeshiaru*.

<sup>34</sup> Sato and NHK 'Ohayo janaru shusahan', p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> Sato, *Rizoto ruto*.

<sup>36</sup> See 'Rizoto tokushu', *Sekai*, June 1990, p. 60, also *Nogyo Kyodo Kaizai*, August 1990, p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> 'Protection of Wildlife' (Editorial), *Mainichi Daily News*, 9 January 1990, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Sato, *Rizoto ruto*, p. 138.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136 (see tables on pp. 136 and 137)

manufacturing, which employs 14.68 million.<sup>40</sup> Its exponential growth has out-performed all other sectors of the economy. Needless to say, there is no net addition to real national wealth or welfare in this. The reverse may be true if one considers the burden for millions of ordinary people whose lives are outside the virtuous circles of speculation and for whom escalating land prices represent a nightmare. Land constitutes 65 per cent of Japan's national wealth, against comparable figures of 25 per cent for (West) Germany, 33 per cent for the US, and a mere 2.5 per cent for the UK.<sup>41</sup> On current prices a piece of land about 100 square metres in central Tokyo could be exchanged for a castle in Europe or a modest-sized island in Canada or Australia. The proportion in contemporary Japan appears to be without historical precedent, although England before the Glorious Revolution of 1688 went close.<sup>42</sup>

Let me turn back to the context within which the 'Resort State' of contemporary Japan evolved. Since the huge Japanese trade surpluses began to build up from the early 1980s, Japan has faced pressures arising from its trade 'wars' to prime its domestic pump and to promote imports. At the same time it has faced the growing discrepancy between life in Tokyo and the metropolitan megalopolis along its eastern seaboard and the rest of the country, particularly rural Japan. The attempts under the various 'Comprehensive National Development Plans', including the 'Technopolis' strategy, had achieved little, agriculture was in profound recession, with the rice support price being steadily reduced from 1986. Stockpiles of rice consumed huge subsidies, while perhaps only half the country's 200,000 hectares of rice fields would be enough to feed the people. Other agricultural and forest industries were also in crisis, especially from the consequences of trade liberalization. Japan's nationally owned forest enterprises were sunk in an apparently inescapable fiscal bog, with a cumulative deficit for the period 1975-88 of over 800 thousand million yen and a long-term debt of nearly 1.9 million million yen built up over the same period.<sup>43</sup> The insistence, under the 'administrative reform' principles of the 1980s, that they pay their way left no alternative to the removal of barriers to the 'development' of national lands and the active promotion of 'resort'.

Farm, fishing and mountain villages throughout the country were suffering from enormous debts, depopulation, ageing, isolation, and despair over the constant shifts and abandonment of one after another national policy for their recovery. With the massive appreciation of the yen following the 'Plaza' agreement of May 1985 these pressures became acute. The 'old style' export industries of steel and ships were shaken, manufacturing went offshore rather than to the regional bases designated under the various plans, and agriculture was again sacrificed to the imperative of expanded imports. The Maekawa Report of April 1986 enunciated these themes most clearly. Huge infrastructural,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Fujiwara, 'Kansure naki shizen hakai e no michi', p. 140. On the general rural and fishing industry crisis the NHK film material is evocative.

urban-development, and land-release programmes were undertaken. Reliance on the private sector (*seishaku*) was the watchword throughout, and the domestic economy was both awash with the trade surplus and capital gains from the revalued yen, but stimulated by the low-interest-rate policy. An urban land speculative boom gathered force during the so-called 'Urban Renaissance' of 1985–87 when Tokyo land prices rose by an average 300 per cent,<sup>44</sup> and was extended throughout the entire country from 1987 by the effects of the Fourth National Comprehensive Development Plan (*Yonzensu*) and the Resort Law. *Yonzensu* envisaged an investment of 1,000 million million yen between 1986 and the turn of the century in the provision of basic infrastructural amenity to the entire country. The public input was to come from the freeing of public assets, especially land, to be complemented by private investment in transport, housing, communications, information technology, and urban redevelopment. The Resort Law spelled out the detailed workings of the *Yonzensu* principles.

The 'Resort' and 'Leisure' strategy had the multiple merit of addressing the ends of domestic pump priming, responding to regional and agricultural sector crisis, reducing the public-sector debt at central and local levels, servicing the politically important construction and real-estate interests, and appearing to signify a slowing down in the expansionary thrust of Japanese capitalism, an intention to relax. Relaxation, along with freshness, greenness and 'my life' was to prove a hollow promise.

It is precisely 'relaxation' or 'slowing down' which is commonly interpreted among the bureaucratic and business elite as a symptom of the 'English disease' or the 'advanced country disease', and therefore to be avoided at all costs. The 'Resort Archipelago' formula devised by Prime Minister Nakasone was designed to reduce the surplus and placate trading partners without increasing demand; in short it created a huge new market and fed fierce expansionary pressures precisely by avoiding the sorts of structural reform that were needed. The wizards of financial magic (*zaitaku*) were invited to stretch their wands and practise their arcane arts of asset multiplying throughout the country. Instead of Japan's high growth flowing, it entered a more frenzied phase, involving not only the established real estate and development companies but also trading companies, hotel chains, railway companies, insurance companies, banks, shipbuilders and finance groups. In the 'Green Japan Plan Phase 2', published in July 1988, resorts were described for the first time as 'a new basic industry for Japan'.<sup>45</sup>

The circuits described in the earlier part of this paper are the functional equivalent of asset stripping, M. and A., and most recently of the savings and loan institutional phenomena in the Anglo-Saxon world, save that for Japan it is always land that is central to the patterns of accumulation. Land and stocks are collateral for borrowing and further investment in land and stocks. Taxation on profits is minimized by writing off interest payments on the portion of acquisition

<sup>44</sup> Miyamoto Kenichi, 'Nihon kankyo hokoku—Rizoto ho o kangeru' (Report on the Japanese Environment—Reflecting on the Resort Law), *Asahi journal*, 10 November 1989, p. 53.

<sup>45</sup> Sato, *Rizoto ruiro*, pp. 171–2.

monies that is loan funded.<sup>46</sup> A well-known academic commentator suggested in his recent column in the Sunday edition of the *Nihon Kaizai Shinbun* that the Seibu Group, with assets of about 12 million million yen, may have paid no taxes since the company was founded in 1920.<sup>47</sup>

As the Tokyo money spread over the countryside and began to replicate, it affected the whole country with a different 'advanced country' disease—speculation and inflation—which may in the end prove more debilitating than the one Japan struggles to avoid. The twin phenomena of *jiage* and *tochi korogashi*, loosely meaning 'deliberate inflation of land values' and 'quick turnover', exact as heavy a price on the social and moral values of local Japanese communities as do the resorts themselves of the physical environment.

### The International Dimension

Furthermore, as Japanese economic influence spreads, naturally the patterns of the Japanese domestic political economy are reproduced through a widening regional and global sphere of influence. Throughout the 1980s the level of capital flowing out of Japan into tourism and real-estate development around the region grew steadily, stimulated by the accumulation of trade surplus, the inflation of domestic land and stock assets, and the availability of cheap credit (commonly around 4 per cent) against the collateral of land. In 1990, Japan's outflow of direct foreign investment funds to the world (\$44.1 thousand million) surpassed that of the US (\$31.7 thousand million) and Britain (\$31.8 thousand million),<sup>48</sup> while in Australia 1989–90 figures showed a negative net flow of funds from Australia to both the US (\$1.315 thousand million or approximately \$1 thousand million) and Britain (\$12.018 thousand million or approximately \$1.6 thousand million) but a continuing strong inflow of Japanese money (\$16.830 thousand million or approximately \$5.5 thousand million).<sup>49</sup> In aggregate terms, too, Japan seems likely to become 'number one' in the near future. By the end of the 1980s, as a result, many of the first-class hotels, golf courses, and luxury hotels and apartment buildings in places like the Australian Gold Coast, and in Hawaii, were in Japanese hands. Japanese funds flowed into the Gold Coast area at the rate of over \$1 thousand million per year during the 1980s, rising in 1990 to \$7.25 thousand million to Surfers Paradise alone,<sup>50</sup> where half the property in the Central Business District was by then reported to be under Japanese ownership.<sup>51</sup> Large projects for marinas, golf courses, luxury apartments and hotels were also under way in North Queensland, Western Australia and northern New South Wales.

There is a peculiar irony in this, succinctly expressed in a comment by Hiroshi Sakai, chief representative in Australia of Nomura Research

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>47</sup> Nakazaki Gen, quoted in Tanaka Yasuo, 'Faddishu kogengaku' (Faddish phenomenology), *Asahi jomaru*, 30 March 1990, p. 86.

<sup>48</sup> 'Chokusetsu toshi—Nihon eibei nuki sekai ichi' (Japan surpasses Britain and America to become number one in foreign investment), *Asahi shinbun*, 21 December 1990.

<sup>49</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics figures.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Wilmoth, *The Age*, 22 September 1990.

<sup>51</sup> *The Australian*, 16–17 June 1990.

Institute: 'Many Japanese businessmen work from eight o'clock in the morning to eleven o'clock at night and can't take long vacations. Strangely, this is done to invest in the US, Australia and other countries where people work nine to five and have four weeks vacation... [and] live in big houses with two-car garages and swimming pools.'<sup>32</sup> In such a 'conflict of cultures' it is hard to be sure of any outcome. Most Australians would probably hope that Japan's money and power could be absorbed while, Asterix-like, the values that helped create or inflate it were quietly subverted by a different vision of 'the good life'; many Japanese, too, incline spontaneously to understand and support an Australian value-orientation on work and leisure rather than their more familiar 'Japanese' models.

One index of the degree to which Japanese patterns are to be reproduced in Australia will be the fate of the 'Multifunction Polis' project.<sup>33</sup> Still little known outside Australia, this originated in a 1987 Japanese government proposal to Australia to construct a joint 'City of the Future' on Australian soil. The original design of the city, presented by the Japanese MITI, strongly suggested a fusion of the twin Japanese strategies of the 1980s: high-tech and high-touch, or technopolis and resort. Between the distinct Australian aspiration for the former and the Japanese focus on the peculiar version of the latter promoted by the resort boom, the issue is still to be settled. A straw in the wind was the appointment in August 1990 of Eishiro Saito as joint chairman of the International Advisory Committee to the MFP project. Saito, head of Keidanren in 1990, had been one of the central figures in the founding in 1979 of Japan Project Industrial Council (JAPIC), a group made up of 110 companies organized to fight the recession that then threatened basic industries such as steel and cement. JAPIC pressures succeeded in securing a series of measures of public-sector subsidy and support for the expansion of private-sector role, first in the rebuilding of Japanese cities, then in the infrastructural development objectives of *Yozukusu*, and later still in the 'Green Japan' plans for resort development. How the advice he has to offer Australia will reflect the very mixed achievement of these various programmes remains to be seen, but there is no doubt that the expansive and reproductive energy of Japan's resort development will play a significant role in determining the meaning of 'development' in Australia's future, and in the future of many Pacific countries.

### 'Enrich the Country, Impoverish the People'

The phenomena that I describe are magnified in their import by the fact that Japanese money constitutes nearly 40 per cent of international bank assets,<sup>34</sup> or about the same proportion of total world capital and financial assets.<sup>35</sup> The core of this vast sum is money being used as stakes in, or deriving from winnings at, the land and

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Linda Korporeal, 'The bonsai effect shrinks Japan's global money tree', *The Age*, 1 February 1991.

<sup>33</sup> On this project, see Gavan McCormack, ed., *Bonsai Australia: Multifunctionpolis and the Making of Special Relationship with Japan*, Sydney 1991.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Rowley, 'Feet of Clay', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 October 1990, p. 44.

<sup>35</sup> Economic Planning Agency, *Sekai hokokusho* (World whitepaper), 1989, quoted in Sato, *Rizoku roku*, p. 140.

money game in Tokyo. In addition, a study of 839 top companies in the Tokyo Stock Exchange recently argued that land assets made up 44 per cent of their total assets, though nominally only 4 per cent.<sup>56</sup> Between January and October 1990, stock prices on the Japanese Nikkei index plunged 48 per cent, a loss equivalent to twice the Third World's outstanding debt, or 'more than four times the estimated 30 year \$500 thousand million cost of bailing out America's savings and loan industry'.<sup>57</sup> Land prices, too, floating in a 'sea of debt', were reported to have begun to sink, by some 10 to 20 per cent from their peak. Credit was reported to be drying up, and financial and other institutions facing financial trauma from 'the bursting of the biggest speculative bubble seen this century'. Reflecting on the possible implications of all this, *The Economist* noted that 'It is therefore scary that such a large amount of the world's available credit has been extended to a market which is so inefficient and so illiquid.'<sup>58</sup>

That such phenomena will have large regional (and world) as well as domestic consequences cannot be doubted. Already, early in 1991, Australia's biggest foreign investor, the Japanese company EIE, was in the hands of its bankers, its sustaining mechanism of high leverage and low-interest-capital availability having at least temporarily broken down. Other resort, real-estate and speculative companies were contracting, or were under investigation by police or tax authorities in Tokyo for share manipulation, insider trading, or tax evasion. Whether the great Japanese land bubble will eventually burst, or simply continue slowly deflating, remains to be seen. Whatever happens, the whole world will be affected.

Within Japan, the need for relaxation and leisure remains unfulfilled. If anything, the frenetic pace of life intensifies. The unspoiled natural environment that till recently made Japan one of the most attractive countries on earth is being progressively eroded by 'resort' development. The felling of 1 per cent of Japan's forests for golf-course development<sup>59</sup> does complex damage to the environment: the diminishing of forest cover accelerates the 'Greenhouse' effect, but the reduction of Japan's domestic timber reserves also stimulates an increased reliance on imported timber, and therefore depredation of Third World forests, thus doubling the contribution to the 'Greenhouse' effect.

The human stock of both urban and rural Japan, the people, are disoriented and swept up in vast dislocating transformations occasioned by the inflation of the capital stock. These changes sow alienation and unrest, erode political and economic morality, and devastate the heritage of people received from their ancestors in trust. While the giant forest trees of Shiretoko in northern Japan are felled to try to achieve solvency for the Forest Agency,<sup>60</sup> one of the world's finest colonies of blue coral is threatened by planned resort development at Ishigaki

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Wood, 'Japanese Finance', special supplement to *The Economist*, 8 December 1990, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>59</sup> Yamada, 'The Triple Evil of Golf Courses', p. 235.

<sup>60</sup> Honda Katsulchi, *Asahi jomaru*, 15 December 1989.

island, far to the south.<sup>61</sup> Those who know Kawabata's classic novel *Snow Country*, with its opening lines 'The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country. The earth lay white under the night sky', or who were ever able to go through that tunnel into the world of Kawabata, would be astounded today at the high-rise vistas that now confront one there.<sup>62</sup> The hot-spring village of Echigo Yuzawa received 7.2 million visitors in 1987, and its land price rose by a factor of ten in the three years to 1989; it was literally swallowed by Tokyo, though 167 kilometres distant.<sup>63</sup>

Rural Japan is gripped by quiet despair. In the towns the housing crisis worsens, with land inflation driving ordinary people to commute further and further to work—over 20 per cent of them in Tokyo commuting for more than three hours per day.<sup>64</sup> Symptomatic of the failure to solve this problem is the rise of what may be known as 'reverse' resort life style, where 'home village' or *furusato* is redefined as the place outside Tokyo where one leaves one's family during the week to live in a capsule hotel (or equivalent) in Tokyo, returning at weekends to the 'resort mansion'.<sup>65</sup> Resorts have little to do with leisure and recreation, much with the search for response to international pressures and the growing centrality within the domestic economy of construction and speculative capital. The resort strategy was designed to satisfy domestic pressure groups and mitigate foreign pressure by stimulating and expanding the domestic market (*naiju kakudai*), promoting foreign imports, especially of agricultural items, by further weakening domestic producers and liberalizing imports. These it can be said to have achieved. However, it was also presented as a strategy to invigorate declining local communities, relieve their isolation and chronic ageing profile, and to provide facilities to meet the need of the Japanese people as a whole for relaxation and recreation. These goals it has signally failed to achieve, and indeed they now look to have been essentially propaganda designed to facilitate promotion of the scheme.

In the long run it may turn out that even the macroeconomic gains were illusory or counter-productive and that the resort strategy has merely camouflaged a failure to resolve basic problems of urban and rural work, housing and food, while instead of alleviating trade pressures the growing wave of Japanese investment in the resort and tourist industries of the whole Pacific region may sharpen them.

In the Japanese islands homogeneous, vulgar and *nouveau riche* 'resorts' drawn to identical Tokyo design proliferate. Local interests or peculiarities are swallowed up and negated; the natural environment which originally justified the siting of the resort facilities is undermined; and environmental damage, whose ultimate costs—including economic costs—are incalculable, spreads; social morality

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<sup>61</sup> Of many sources on this problem, most useful in English are the regular reports in *Japan Environment Monitor*.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, the photos in *Saishu*, June 1990, pp. 30–31, or in Sato and NHK 'Ohayo janaru shuseihan', pp. 27, 32.

<sup>63</sup> Sato, *Rizotto ratta*, p. 114.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 20. Also NHK Dokumento supeshiaru.

<sup>65</sup> A vision defined by then prime minister Takeshita in December 1987, quoted in Sato, *Rizotto ratta*, p. 21.

is undermined and communities divided as speculative virus spreads and erodes the ethic of work and production that brought Japan 'success' in the first place.

Few were surprised in December 1990 when tax authorities began questioning Mr Toshiyuki Inamura, the man who, as director-general of the Environment Agency in 1986 and 1987, had presided over the first stages of the resort boom, for evading taxes on approximately 2.8 thousand million yen profit generated on stock dealings from companies actively involved in the 'development'.<sup>66</sup> The investigators were focusing on Inamura's connections with the well-known speculator, Mitsuhiro Kotani, who earlier had been indicted on charges of stock-price manipulation.

Resolution of these problems will not be easy. The tide of golf courses, ski resorts and marinas that now rises over the land is striking for its irrelevance to the needs and problems of local communities, many of whom now see the whole process as a contemporary form of enclosure movement, in which public land, forests, mountains and beaches are enclosed by private interests for corporate profit. While corporate Japan thrives, they say, the people suffer. Hence the recently coined slogan: *fukoku hinmin* (Enrich the country, impoverish the people). Such has been the cost of Japan's success in the quest for affluence.

Japanese commentators commonly agree on certain elements of an alternative prescription.<sup>67</sup> The regions will only be 'invigorated' by finding solutions to their problems which are locally driven, arising from and responding to local needs, and based upon strong institutions of local self-government that have the power and the will to control external interventions by big (Tokyo) corporations and bureaucrats. Small developments, rooted in agriculture, craft, or various low-cost, non-intrusive activities would be given precedence under such a prescription. The forests and mountains, home to the ancestors of local communities, would be protected, and the fields and seas which are the source of their basic livelihood respected. The speculative virus would be resisted like the plague, while the stressed workers and residents of the megalopolis could take rest and recuperation in close proximity to the natural world.

Ultimately, only a Japan which begins to overcome its frenetic restlessness and to deepen its democratic and ecological ethos along such lines will be able to resolve the stresses and frictions in its relationship with the outside world.

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<sup>66</sup> Various Japanese media reports, 19 December 1990 and subsequent.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Miyamoto Kenichi, Yokota Shigeru, and Nakamura Kojiro, *City-ku haiseigaku* (Regional Economics), Yuhikaku bukku 1990, pp. 339ff; and, for a union response to the problem, Zen Nihon jichi dantai rodo kumiai (Union of All-Japan Local Government Workers), *Atarashi yidai no kuni-chiho hanjishi* (State-locality relations for a new era), October 1989, pp. 52-7.



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Untitled, 1985

## *A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman*

When I was in school I was getting disgusted with the attitude of art being so religious or sacred, so I wanted to make something which people could relate to without having read a book about it first. So that anybody off the street could appreciate it, even if they couldn't fully understand it; they could still get something out of it. That's the reason why I wanted to imitate something out of the culture, and also make fun of the culture as I was doing it.

Cindy Sherman<sup>1</sup>

Cindy Sherman had a full-scale retrospective in the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1987 and has recently had work on display at the Saatchi Gallery in London.\* At a moment when the art market is rippling with the fallout from the Saatchis' recent decision to sell some conceptual and post-modern work in order to invest in late modernism, this location is a sign of her economic as well as her critical standing. Her art is certainly post-modern. Her works are photographs; she is not a photographer but an artist who uses photography. Each image is built around a photographic depiction of a woman. And each of the women is Sherman herself, simultaneously artist and model, transformed, chameleon-like, into a glossary of pose, gesture and facial expression. As her work developed between 1977 and 1987 a strange process of metamorphosis took place. Apparently easy and accessible postmodern pastiche underwent a gradual transformation into difficult, but still accessible, images that raise serious and challenging questions for contemporary feminist aesthetics. And the metamorphosis provides a

hindsight that then alters the significance of her early production. In order to work through the critical implications of this altered perspective, it is necessary to fly in the face of Sherman's own expressly non-, even anti-, theoretical stance. Paradoxically, it is because there is no explicit citation of theory in the work, no explanatory words, no linguistic signposts, that theory can come into its own. Sherman's work stays on the side of enigma, but as a critical challenge not as insoluble mystery. Figuring out the enigma, deciphering its pictographic clues, applying the theoretical tools associated with feminist aesthetics, is—to use one of her favourite words—fun, and draws attention to the way theory, decipherment and the entertainment of riddle- or puzzle-solving may be connected.

### A New Politics of the Body

During the seventies, feminist aesthetics and women artists contributed greatly to the questioning of two great cultural boundary divisions. Throughout the twentieth century, inexorably but discontinuously, pressure had been building up against the separation of art theory from art practice on the one hand, and the separation between high culture and low culture on the other. The collapse of these divisions, crucial to the many and varied components of postmodernism, was also vital to feminist art. Women artists made use of both theory and popular culture through reference and quotation. Cindy Sherman, first showing work in the late seventies, used popular culture as her source material without using theory as commentary and distancing device. When her photographs were first shown, their insistent reiteration of representations of the feminine, and her use of herself as model, in infinite varieties of masquerade, won immediate attention from critics who welcomed her as a counterpoint to feminist theoretical and conceptual art. The success of her early work, its acceptance by the centre (the art market and institutions) at a time when many artists were arguing for a politics of the margins, helped to obscure both the work's interest for feminist aesthetics and the fact that the ideas it raised could not have been formulated without a prehistory of feminism and its theorization of the body and representation. Sherman's arrival on the art scene certainly marks the beginning of the end of that era in which the female body had become, if not quite unrepresentable, only representable if refracted through theory. But rather than sidestepping, Sherman reacts and shifts the agenda. She brings a different perspective to the 'images of women question' and recuperates a politics of the body that had, perhaps, been lost or neglected in the twists and turns of seventies feminism.

In the early seventies, the women's movement claimed the female body as a site for political struggle, mobilizing around abortion rights, above all, but with other ancillary issues spiralling out into agitation

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\* This article was written while a selection of Cindy Sherman's work was on show at the Saatchi Gallery in London (an exhibition held in conjunction with Richard Artschwager and Richard Wilson from 11 January to 28 July 1991) and went to press before the opening of the Cindy Sherman retrospective at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2 August–22 September).

<sup>1</sup> Sandy Nairne, *The State of the Art. Ideas and Images in the 1980s*, London 1987, p. 132.

over medical marginalization and sexuality itself as a source of women's oppression. A politics of the body led logically to a politics of representation of the body. It was only a small step to include the question of images of women in the accompanying debates and campaigns, but it was a step that also moved feminism out of familiar terrains of political action onto that of political aesthetics. And this small step called for a new conceptual vocabulary and opened feminist theory up to the influence of semiotics and psychoanalysis. The initial idea that images contributed to women's alienation from their bodies and from their sexuality, with an attendant hope of liberation and recuperation, gave way to theories of representation as symptom and signifier of the way problems posed by sexual difference under patriarchy could be displaced onto the feminine.

Not surprisingly, this kind of theoretical/political aesthetics also affected artists working in the climate of seventies feminism, and the representability of the female body underwent a crisis. At one extreme, the film-maker Peter Gidal said in 1978 'I have had a vehement refusal over the last decade, with one or two minor aberrations, to allow images of women into my films at all, since I do not see how those images can be separated from the dominant meanings.'<sup>2</sup> Women artists and film-makers, while rejecting this wholesale banishment, were extremely wary about the investment of 'dominant meanings' in images of women; and while feminist critics turned to popular culture to analyse these meanings, artists turned to theory, juxtaposing images and ideas, to negate dominant meanings and, slowly and polemically, to invent different ones. Although in this climate Cindy Sherman's concentration on the female body seemed almost shocking, her representations of femininity were not a return, but a re-representation, a making strange.

A visitor to a Cindy Sherman retrospective, who moves through the work in its chronological order, must be almost as struck by the dramatic nature of its development, as by the individual, very striking, works themselves. It is not a question of observing an increasing maturity, a changed style, or new directions, but of following a certain narrative of the feminine from an initial premiss to its very end. And this development takes place over ten years, between 1977 and 1987. The journey through time, through the work's chronological development, is also a journey into space. Sherman dissects the phantasmagoric space conjured up by the female body, from its exteriority to its interiority. The visitor who reaches the final images and then returns, reversing the order, finds that with the hindsight of what was to come, the early images are transformed. The first process of discovery, amusement and amazement is completed by a new curiosity, reverie and decipherment. And then, once the process of bodily disintegration is established in the later work, the early, innocent, images acquire a retrospective uncanniness.

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<sup>2</sup> Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, eds, 'The Cinematic Apparatus'. From the discussion that followed Peter Gidal, 'Technology and Ideology in/through/and Avant Garde Film: An Instance', New York 1980, p. 169.



Untitled Film Still, 1979



Untitled Film Still, 1979

## Parodying Voyeurism

The first series of photographs, which also established Sherman's reputation, are called *Untitled Film Stills*. In each photograph Sherman poses for the camera, as though in a scene from a movie. Each photograph has its own *mise en scène*, evoking a style of film-making that is highly connotative but elusive. The black and white photographs seem to refer to the fifties, to the New Wave, to Neo-realism, to Hitchcock, or to Hollywood B pictures: This use of an amorphous connotation places them in a nostalgia genre, comparable to the American movies of the eighties that Fredric Jameson describes as typifying the postmodern characteristic of evoking the past while denying the reference of history.<sup>3</sup> They have the Barthesian quality of 'fifties-ness': that American collective fantasy of the fifties as the time of everyone's youth in a white and mainly middle America setting, in the last moment of calm before the storms of Vietnam, civil rights, and finally feminism. But Sherman twists nostalgia to suggest its dependence on constructing images and representations that conceal more than they record. She also draws attention to the historical importance of this period for establishing a particular culture of appearances—specifically, the feminine appearance. The accoutrements of the feminine struggle to conform to a facade of desirability haunt Sherman's iconography. Make-up, high heels, hair, clothes are all carefully 'put on' and 'done'. Sherman-the-model dresses up into character, while Sherman-the-artist reveals her character's masquerade. The juxtaposition begins to refer to a 'surface-ness', so that nostalgia begins to dissolve into unease. An overinsistence on surface starts to suggest that it might be masking something or other that should be hidden from sight, and a hint of another space starts to lurk inside a too plausible facade. Sherman accentuates the uneasiness by inscribing vulnerability into both the *mise en scène* of the photographs and the women's poses and expressions.

These *Film Still* scenes are set mainly in exteriors. Their fascination is derived from their quality as *trompe l'oeil*. The viewer is subjected to a series of double takes, estrangements and recognitions. The camera looks; it 'captures' the female character in a parody of different voyeurisms. It intrudes into moments in which she is unguarded, sometimes undressed, absorbed into her own world in the privacy of her own environment. Or it witnesses a moment in which her guard drops as she is suddenly startled by a presence, unseen and off-screen, watching her. Or it observes her, simultaneously demure and alluring, composed for the outside world and its intrusive gaze. The viewer is immediately caught by the voyeurisms on offer. But the obvious fact that each character is Sherman herself, disguised, introduces a sense of wonder at the illusion and its credibility. And, as is well known in the cinema, any moment of marvelling at an illusion immediately destroys its credibility. The lure of voyeurism turns around like a trap, and the viewer ends up aware that Sherman-the-artist has set up a machine for making the gaze materialize uncomfortably, in alliance with Sherman-the-model. Then the viewer's curiosity may be attracted to the surrounding narrative. But any speculation about a story, about

<sup>3</sup> F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London 1991, p. 19.

actual events and the character depicted, quickly reaches a dead end. The visitor at a Cindy Sherman show must be well aware that the *Film Still* is constructed for this one image only, and that nothing exists either before or after the moment shown. Each pregnant moment is a cutout, a tableau suggesting and denying the presence of a story. As they pretend to be something more, the *Film Stills* parody the stillness of the photograph and ironically enact the poignancy of a 'frozen moment'. The women in the photographs are almost always in stasis, halted by something more than photography, like surprise, reverie, decorum, anxiety, or just waiting.

The viewer's voyeurism is uncomfortable. There is no complementary exhibitionism on the part of the female figures, and the sense of looking on, unobserved, provokes a mixture of curiosity and anxiety. The images are, however, erotic. Sexuality pervades the figures and their implied narratives, Sherman performs femininity as an appearance, in which the insistent sexualization of woman is integrated into style and respectability. Because Sherman uses cosmetics literally as a mask she makes visible the feminine as masquerade. And it is this homogeneous culture of fifties-like appearance that Sherman uses to adopt such a variety of same, but different, figurations. Identity, she seems to say, lies in looks. But just as she is artist and model, voyeur and looked-at, active and passive, subject and object, the photographs set up a comparable variety of positions and responses for the viewer. There is no stable subject position in her work, no resting point that does not quickly shift into something else. So the *Film Stills'* initial sense of homogeneity and credibility break up into the kind of heterogeneity of subject position that feminist aesthetics espoused in advance of postmodernism proper.

### Soft-Core Pastiche

In 1980 Sherman made her first series of colour photographs, using back-projections of exteriors rather than actual locations, moving into a closer concentration on the face, and flattening the space of the photograph. Then, in 1981, she produced a series of colour photographs that start to suggest an interior space, and initiate her exploration inside the masquerade of femininity's interior/exterior binary opposition. The photographs all have the same format, horizontal like a cinemascope screen, so most of the figures lie on sofas or beds, or on the floor. As the series originated with a centrefold for *Artforum*, they give a strong sense of soft-core pastiche. These photographs concentrate on the sphere of feminine emotion, longing and reverie and are set in private spaces that reduplicate the privacy of emotion. But, once again, an exact sensation is impossible to pin down. The young women that Sherman impersonates may be daydreaming about a future romance, or they may be mourning a lost one. They may be waiting, in enforced passivity, for a letter or telephone call. Their eyes gaze into the distance. They are not aware of their clothes, which are sometimes carelessly rumpled, so that, safe alone with their thoughts, their bodies are, slightly, revealed to the viewer. They exude vulnerability and sexual availability like lovesick heroine/victims in a romantic melodrama. There are some precedents in the *Untitled Film Stills* for this series, but the use of colour, the horizontal format and



the repeated pose create a double theme of inside space and of reverie. The intimate space of a bedroom provides an appropriate setting for daydream or reverie, and combines with Sherman's erotic, suggestive, poses to accumulate connotations of sexuality. These photographs reiterate the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of femininity. While the *Untitled Film Stills* fake a surrounding narrative, so the camera does not draw undue attention to its presence; the 1981 *Untitleds*, on the other hand, announce themselves as photographs and, as in a pin-up, the model's eroticism, and her pose, are directed towards the camera, and ultimately towards the spectator. However, the spectator who looks back at the gaze that sometimes comes out from the image, or is drawn into voyeuristic involvement with the figure displayed, must then remember that the artist both poses herself in a mirror and photographs the scene herself by means of a remote control.

In most of the *Untitled Film Stills* the female figure stands out in sharp contrast to her surroundings, exaggerating her vulnerability in an exterior world. In some, however, a visible grain merges the figure with the texture and material of the photograph. In the 1981 series, Sherman's use of colour and of light and shade merges the female figure and her surroundings into a continuum, without hard edges. Pools of light illuminate patches of skin or bathe the picture in soft glow. Above all, the photographs have a glossy, high-quality finish in keeping with the codes and conventions of commercial photography. While the poses are soft and limp—polar opposites of a popular idea of fetishized femininity (high-heeled and corseted erect, flamboyant and exhibitionist)—fetishism returns in the formal qualities of the photography. The sense of surface now resides, not in the female figure's attempt to save her face in a masquerade of femininity, but in the model's subordination to, and imbrication with, the texture of the photographic medium itself.

### Metamorphoses

Sherman's next important phase, the *Untitleds* of 1983, first manifests the darkness that will, from then on, increasingly overwhelm her work. This turn was, in the first place, a reaction against the fashion industry that first invited her to design photographs for them and then tried to modify and tone down the results. 'From the beginning there was something that didn't work with me, like there was friction. I picked out some clothes I wanted to use. I was sent completely different clothes that I found boring to use. I really started to make fun, not of the clothes, but much more of the fashion. I was starting to put scar tissue on my face to become really ugly.'<sup>4</sup>

These photographs use bright, harsh light and high-contrast colour. The characters are theatrical and ham up their roles. A new Sherman body is beginning to emerge. She grotesquely parodies the kind of feminine image that is geared to erotic consumption, and she inverts conventional codes of female allure and elegance. Whereas the language of fashion photography gives great emphasis to lightness, so that its models seem to defy gravity, Sherman's figures are heavy in

<sup>4</sup> Nairne, p. 136.

body and groundedness. Their unselfconsciousness verges on the exhibitionist, and they strike professional poses to display costumes that exaggerate their awkward physiques, which are then exaggerated again by camera angle and lighting. There is absolutely nothing to do with nature or the natural in this response to the cosmetic svelteness of fashion. Rather, they suggest that the binary opposition to the perfect body of the fashion model is the grotesque, and that the smooth glossy body, polished by photography, is a defence against an anxiety-provoking, uneasy and uncanny body. From this perspective the surface of the body, so carefully conveyed in the early photographs, seems to be dissolving to reveal a monstrous otherness behind the cosmetic facade. The 'something' that had seemed to be lurking in the phantasmatic topography of femininity, begins, as it were, to congeal.

After the *Untitleds* of 1983, the anti-fashion series, the metamorphoses become more acute and disturbing. The series *Untitled 1984* is like a reversal of Dorian Gray; as though the pain, anger and stupidity of human nature left their traces clearly on human features, as though the surface was failing in its task of masking. In the next series, inspired by the monsters of fairy stories, the figures become supernatural; and, rather like animistic personifications, they tower above or return to the elements. By this time the figures seem to be the emanations of irrational fears, verging on terror, relics of childhood nightmares. If the 'centrefold' series conveyed, through pose and facial expression, the interiority of secret thoughts, now Sherman seems to personify the stuff of the unconscious itself. While the earlier interiority suggested soft, erotic, reverie, these are materializations of anxiety and dread. Sherman seems to have shifted from conveying or suggesting the presence of a hidden otherness to representing its inhabitants. This is a shift that differentiates between reverie and the stuff of the repressed, the unconscious. Increasingly grotesque and deforming make-up blurs gender identity, and some figures are horned or snouted, like horrific mythological hybrids. If the earlier iconography suggested a passive aspiration to please, deformation and distortion seem to erupt in some kind of ratio to repression. These figures are active and threatening.

Finally, in the last phase, the figure disappears completely. Sometimes body bits are replaced by prosthetics, such as false breasts or buttocks, but, in the last resort, nothing is left but disgust—the disgust of sexual detritus, decaying food, vomit, slime, menstrual blood, hair. These traces represent the end of the road, the secret stuff of bodily fluids that the cosmetic is designed to conceal. The topography of exterior/interior is exhausted. Previously, all Sherman's work had been centred and structured around a portrait, so that a single figure had provided a focus for the viewer's gaze. Surrounding *mis-en-scène* gradually vanished as though Sherman was denying the viewer any mitigation or distraction from the figures themselves as they gradually became more and more grotesque. Around 1985, settings make a comeback in the photographs, but diffused into textures. Natural elements—pebbles, sand or soil, for instance—develop expressive and threatening connotations. Colour, lighting, and the texture of the figures themselves merge them visually into their settings. The camera

angle now looks down onto the ground where the figures lie lifeless, or, perhaps, trapped in their own materiality.

The shift in perspective, to downward camera angle, heralds Sherman's final transformation. When the body, in any homogeneous or cohesive form, disappears from the scene, its traces and detritus are spread out on the ground, on pebbles or sand, or submerged in water. With the disintegration of the body, the photographs also lose any homogeneous and cohesive formal organization and the sense of physical fragmentation is echoed in the fragmentation of the images. Now the edge of the image may be as significant as any other section of its space. At the same time the photographs have become monstrously enlarged. The early series, *Untitled Film Stills*, were all in the format of eight by ten inches, while the late series have grown to dimensions such as seventy-two by forty-nine inches. The viewer could take in the early work with a glance and sense of command over the image; the late photographs overwhelm the viewer and force the eye to scan the surface, searching for a specific shape or pattern that might offer some formal reassurance against the disturbing content.

### De-fetishizing the Female Body

From the perspective of feminist aesthetics, this narrative of disintegration, horror and finally disgust, raises, first and foremost, the question of the source, or origin, of this phantasmagoria of the female body, and, secondly, how it might be analysed. Sherman depicts a phantasmatic space, projected onto and then into the female body. A variety of issues are raised by the question of spatial metaphor. First of all, there is certainly a sense in which Sherman's ironic 'unveiling' also 'unveils' the use of the female body as a metaphor for division between surface allure and concealed decay, as though the stuff that has been projected for so long into a mythic space 'behind' the mask of femininity had suddenly broken through the delicately painted veil. This veil is exemplified by the myth of enchantress-turned-hag, out of which the dualistic mythology of the female body came to represent the opposition between truth and artifice. Barbara Spackman, in her discussion of the appropriation of the female body as metaphor by symbolist aesthetics, comments on this figuration: 'As a figure for hermeneutics itself, it may be read as enacting the discovery of essence that lies beneath appearance, truth beneath falsehood, reality beneath fiction, plain speech beneath cosmetic rhetoric. Indeed... Nietzsche uses this very topos in order to overturn it, in order to critique the hermeneutic model that would find an essence beneath appearance. These are, of course, valid interpretations. Yet they discard the literal in order to concentrate on the figural and do not ask why woman is favoured as the vehicle of the metaphor.'<sup>3</sup>

As Spackman argues, woman becomes 'the favoured vehicle of the metaphor' once she is seen as the site of castration, so the origin of this phantasmagoria of the female body may be found in the structure of the unconscious, and may be deciphered with the aid of

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Spackman, *Decadent Genealogies: The Rhetoric of Sickness from Baudelaire to D'Ausezme*, Ithaca 1989, p. 165.

psychoanalytic theory. A cosmetic, artificial appearance then conceals the wound or void left in the male psyche when it perceives sexual difference. In this sense, the topography of the feminine masquerade echoes the topography of the fetish itself. It could certainly be argued that the metamorphosis of the feminine in Sherman's work traces this mythic figuration, and, in parodying the metaphor, returns in the last resort to the 'literal', to the bodily fluids and wastes that become condensed with wounded body in the iconography of misogyny. But she also, dramatically, draws attention to the regime of representational and mythological contradiction lived by women under patriarchy. Although the origin of the image may be in the unconscious, and although the image may be a phantasm, these collective fantasies also have an impact in reality and produce symptoms that mediate between the two. The late photographs are a reminder that the female psyche may well identify with misogynistic revulsion against the female body and attempt to erase signs that mark her physically as feminine. The images of decaying food and vomit raise the spectre of the anorexic girl, who tragically acts out the fashion fetish of the female as an eviscerated, cosmetic and artificial construction designed to ward off the 'otherness' hidden in the 'interior'.

It is hard to trace the collapse of the female body as successful fetish without re-representing the anxieties and dreads that give rise to the fetish in the first place, and Sherman might be open to the accusation that she reproduces the narrative without a sufficiently critical context. It is here that the *Untitled Film Stills* may be re-read with the hindsight of the future development of Sherman's work in mind. To return to the early photographs in this way is to see how the female body can become a conduit for different ideas superimposed, as it were, and condensed into a single image. For instance, the uncanniness of the women characters, behind their cosmetic facades, starts to merge with the instability of the photograph as object of belief. The structure of fetishism indicates a homology between these different ideas, and the theory of fetishism helps to unravel the process of condensation.

### Between Knowledge and Belief

For Freud, fetishism is particularly significant (apart, that is, from his view that it 'confirmed the castration complex') as a demonstration that the psyche can sustain incompatible ideas, at one and the same time, through a process of disavowal. Fetishistic disavowal acknowledges the possibility of castration (represented by the female, penis-less, genital) and simultaneously denies it. Freud saw the coexistence of these two contradictory ideas, maintained in a single psyche, as a model for the ego's relation to reality: the 'splitting of the ego', which allowed two parallel, but opposed, attitudes to be maintained in uneasy balance. Switching back and forth between visual duping, followed by perception of the duping mechanism, a willing suspension of disbelief followed by a wave of disillusion—'I know . . . but all the same . . . '—the viewer of Sherman's *Film Stills* can almost physically feel, and indeed relish, the splitting open of the gap between knowledge and belief.

This 'oscillation effect' is important to postmodernism. The viewer looks, recognizes a style, doubts, does a double take, then recognizes

that the style is a citation, and meanings shift and change their reference like shifting perceptions of perspective from an optical illusion. This effect is, perhaps, particularly exciting because it dices with credibility in a manner similar to the fetish. In this sense, Cindy Sherman pushes postmodern play to its limits. When the viewer reaches the final photographs of disintegration and only reluctantly recognizes the content for what it is, the art aspect of Sherman's work returns. It is not so much that the colours of the detritus images are more 'painterly' and their reference is more to the shape of the frame than the figure, but that their place on the gallery wall affirms their status as art, just as the viewer is about to turn away in revolted disbelief. In this sense, they, too, create an 'oscillation effect', this time between reverence and revulsion. This kind of theme is present in Sherman's latest works, which are outside the 1978-87 'narrative' and return to the figuration of the human body, now refracted through art itself. She reproduces old masters, taking the role of the central figure, or impersonating a portrait. Again, she distorts the body with false additions, such as the breast in a Virgin and Child. Although these images lack the inexorability and complexity of her previous phase, she still plays on the structures of disavowal and draws attention to the art-historical fetishization of great works and their value.

For Freud, the structure of fetishism was not the same as the structure of repression. While providing a substitute and a replacement and literally a screen against a traumatic memory, the fetish is also a memento of loss and substitution. And in these circumstances, how the female body, the original provoker of castration anxiety, is represented may be symptomatic and revealing. When Sherman depicts femininity as a masquerade in her succession of 'dressings-up', the female body asserts itself as a site of anxiety that it must, at all costs, conceal. And it acquires a self-conscious vulnerability that seems to exude tension between an exterior appearance and its interiority. In this way, Sherman plays with a 'topography' of the female body. But the early photographs illustrate the extent to which this 'topography' has been integrated into a culture of the feminine. In order to create a 'cosmetic' body a cosmetics industry has come into being, so that the psychic investment the patriarchy makes in feminine appearance is echoed by an investment on the part of capitalism. And cosmetics are also, of course, the tools of Sherman's trade.

Fetishism depends on a phantasmatic topography, setting up a screen and shield, closely linked to the ego's defence mechanism, as Freud pointed out. At the same time, fetishism is the most semiotic of perversions, screening and shielding by means of an object that is, unavoidably, also a sign of loss and substitution. But its semiotic enterprise is invested in the deceit of artifice. The fetish is, as Nietzsche said of woman, 'so artistic'. As feminist theorists have noted, the female body not only reduplicates this structure—of a surface as screen and anxiety-provoking interior, the enchantress/hag dichotomy—but it can incarnate the fetish object itself. This syndrome came into its own with the Hollywood star system, the mass production of pin-ups, and the equation, in contemporary consumer culture, between the feminine and glamour.

Cindy Sherman traces the abyss or morass that overwhelms the defetishized body, deprived of the fetish's semiotic, reduced to being 'unspeakable' and devoid of significance. Her late work comes close to depicting the Kristevan concept of the abject: that is, the disgust aroused in the human psyche by lifeless, inanimate bodily matter, bodily wastes and the dead body itself.<sup>6</sup> For Kristeva, abjection is closely associated with separation from the mother's body. The small child, of both sexes, in the process of establishing autonomous subjectivity, has to establish an autonomous 'clean and proper body'. While previously the child found pleasure in its bodily wastes and the satisfying undifferentiation between its body and that of its mother, when it needs to define boundaries and separations, feelings of disgust come into play. Barbara Creed's argument that abjection is central to the recurring image of the 'monstrous feminine' in horror movies is also applicable to the monstrous in Sherman.<sup>7</sup> Although her figures materialize the stuff of irrational terror, they also have pathos and could easily be understood in terms of 'the monster as victim'. Her photographs of atrophied figures (for instance, the corpse that lies like a soiled wax-work, eyes staring and blending with colour tones into the grass) could be collected into a lexicon of horror and the uncanny, just as the *Untitled Film Stills* are like a lexicon of poses and gestures typical of respectable, but still uncanny, femininity. The 1987 series suggests that, although both sexes are subject to abjection, it is women who can explore and analyse the phenomenon with greater equanimity, as it is the female body that has come, not exclusively but predominantly, to represent the shudder aroused by liquidity and decay.

### Fifties America: The Democracy of Glamour

By referring to the fifties in her early work, Sherman joins many others in identifying Eisenhower's America as the mythic birthplace of postmodern culture. Reference to the fifties invokes the aftermath of the Korean War and the success of the Marshall Plan, American mass consumption and the 'society of the spectacle'; a time when, in the context of the Cold War, advertising, movies and the actual packaging and seductiveness of commodities all marketed glamour. Glamour proclaimed the desirability of American capitalism to the outside world and, inside, secured American-ness as an aspiration for the newly suburbanized, white, population as it buried incompatible memories of immigrant origins. In Sherman's early photographs, connotations of vulnerability and instability flow over on to the construction and credibility of the wider, social masquerade. The image of fifties-ness as a particular emblem of American-ness, also masks the fact that it was a decade of social and political repression while profound change gathered on the horizon—the transition, that is, from Joe McCarthy to James Dean. Rather than simply referring to 'fifties-ness' in nostalgia mode, Sherman hints at a world ingesting the seeds of its own decay. She is closer, therefore, to *Blue Velvet* than to *American Graffiti*.

It is interesting, in the light of the American postmodern citation of

<sup>6</sup> Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, New York 1982.

<sup>7</sup> See Barbara Creed, 'Alone and the Monstrous-Feminine', in Annette Kuhn, ed., *Alone Zone. Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, London 1990.

the fifties, to consider the pivotal place occupied by Marilyn Monroe, as an icon in her own right, and as source of all the subsequent Marilyn iconography, kept alive by gay subculture, surfacing with Debbie Harry in the late seventies and perpetuated by Madonna in the eighties (particularly, of course, her 'Material Girl'). In 1982 Cindy Sherman appeared on the cover of the Anglo-American avant-garde magazine *ZG*. She is immediately recognizable as Marilyn Monroe, in cover-girl pose. She is not the Marilyn of bright lights and diamonds, but the other, equally familiar, Marilyn in slacks and a shirt, still epitomizing the glamour of the period, hand held to thrown-back head, eyes half closed, lips open. But refracted through Sherman's masquerade, Marilyn's masquerade fails to mask her interior anxiety, and unhappiness seems to seep through the cracks. America's favourite fetish never fully succeeded in papering over her interiority, and the veil of sexual allure now seems, in retrospect, to be haunted by death.

Cindy Sherman's impersonations predate, and in some ways prefigure, those of Madonna. Madonna's performances make full use of the potential of cosmetics. As well as fast changing her own chameleon-like appearance on a day-to-day basis, she performs homages to the artificial perfection of the movie stars and also integrates the 'oscillation effect' into the rhythm of her videos, synchronizing editing, personality change and sexual role reversals. Although Madonna, obviously, does not follow the Cindy Sherman narrative of disintegration, her awareness of this, other, side of the topography of feminine masquerade is evidenced in her well-documented admiration for Frida Kahlo. Frida depicted her face, in an infinite number of self-portraits, as a mask, and veiled her body in elaborate Tehuana dresses. Sometimes the veil falls, and her wounded body comes to the surface, condensing her real, physical, wounds with both the imaginary wound of castration and the literal interior space of the female body, the womb, bleeding, in her autobiographical painting, from miscarriage. Frida Kahlo's mask was always her own. Marilyn's was like a trademark. While Cindy Sherman and Madonna shift appearance into a fascinating debunking of stable identity, Marilyn's masquerade had to be always absolutely identical. Her features were able to accept cosmetic modelling into an instantly recognizable sign of 'Marilyn-ness'. But here, too, the mask is taut, threatened by the gap between public stardom and private pressures (as was the case for everyone caught in the Hollywood Babylon of the studio system's double standards) and also by the logic of the topography itself.

In becoming the democracy of glamour, fifties America completed a process, through the movies and through mass-produced clothes and cosmetics, that had been launched in the thirties and interrupted by the Second World War. It was also a paradigmatic moment for commodity fetishism. Baudrillard has noted the origin of the word 'fetish' in the Portuguese *feticço*, derived from the Latin *factitius*: 'From the same root (*facio, factitius*) as *feticço* comes the Spanish *afectar*: "to paint, to adorn, to embellish" and *afite* "preparation, ornamentation, cosmetics".'<sup>8</sup> He suggests that this etymology from the artificial and

<sup>8</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St Louis 1981, p. 91

the cosmetic implies a homology between the fetishized figure of bodily beauty and the fetishism of the commodity. The commodity, too, is haunted by the gap between knowledge and belief. By exploiting the gap between knowledge and belief, inherent in the complexity of value, the commodity can erase its origin in the labour of the working class, at the production line, and turn a phantasmatic, cosmetic, face to the world. And, as feminists have so often noted, the seal and guarantee of its success in the market place is so often the veneer of sexualized glamour generated by juxtaposition to the sexualized glamour of femininity in advertising. Although Cindy Sherman's work is not about the commodity, the citation of the fifties brings to mind this complex network of homologies. The failure of the fetish, which she traces through images of the feminine, is similar to the polarization of gloss in the shop window, and disavowals of the factory that flourish when society cannot find a way of narrating the contradictions in its history.

In refusing the word/image juxtaposition, so prevalent in the art of the seventies and eighties, Sherman may draw the accusation that she is, herself, stuck in the topographic double bind of the fetish and its collapse. Although she may be thus unable to inscribe the means of decipherment into the work itself, her use of *Untitled* to describe her works turns inability into refusal. Her work does, however, vividly illustrate the way that the human psyche thrives on the division between surface and secret, and that, standing for repression of all kinds, this recurring spatial metaphor cannot be swept away. The wordlessness and despair in her work represents the wordlessness and despair that ensues when a fetishistic structure, the means of erasing history and memory, collapses, leaving a void in its wake. The fetish necessarily wants history to be overlooked. That is its function. The fetish is also a symptom, and as such has a history which may be deciphered, but only by refusing its phantasmatic topography. Freud described the structure of the psyche through spatial metaphor to convey the burying action of repression, but he analysed the language of the unconscious, its formal expression in condensation and displacement, in terms of signification and decipherment. In the last resort, decipherment is dependent on language. The complete lack of verbal clues and signifiers in Cindy Sherman's work draws attention to the semiotic that precedes a successful translation of the symptom into language, the semiotic of displacements and fetishism, desperately attempting to disguise unconscious ideas from the conscious mind. She uses iconography, connotation, or the sliding of the signifier, in a trajectory that ends by stripping away all accrued meaning to the limit of bodily matter. However, even this bedrock—the vomit and the blood for instance—returns to cultural significance; that is, to the difficulty of the body, and above all the female body, while it is subjected to the icons and narratives of fetishism.



## Tenured Radicals, the New McCarthyism, and 'PC'

'Watch What You Say,' warned the cover of *Newsweek* in December of last year. 'There's a "Politically Correct" Way to Talk About Race, Sex, and Ideas. Is This the New Enlightenment—or the New McCarthyism?' Answering this question in a blurb for Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* (1991), the latest in a string of recent books purporting to unveil the horrors wreaked upon American universities by the grown-up leftists of the sixties, old New Leftist Eugene Genovese testified for the prosecution: 'Academic freedom and indeed the very soul of American education are succumbing to a sinister McCarthyite assault of unprecedented proportions.'<sup>2</sup> When President Bush weighed in on the subject in May, denunciations of 'political correctness' had already raced like wildfire through the American media, claiming front-page columns in dozens of newspapers and lavish blocks of prime-time television debate.<sup>3</sup> The abbreviation 'PC' had become a household word.

What is going on here? Why a revival of fifties motifs and fifties hysteria now that the Cold War is over? If there really is a 'Red Menace' prowling the corridors of American universities, shouldn't the Left know something more about it?

The immediate excuse for the PC flap came from a series of cases in which students were disciplined or expelled for racist and homophobic attacks, and in which professors were criticized in public by students (but *not* disciplined) for racial and sexual insensitivity. Some of these cases, like the fraternity at the University of Wisconsin that held a mock slave auction, were very ugly. Others, where the intentions were clearly better, can only be blamed on the old dogs/new tricks rule: the sluggishness with which certain scholars have assimilated the fact that

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry Adler et al, 'Taking Offence', *Newsweek*, 24 December 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*, New York 1991. See also Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*, New York 1990.

<sup>3</sup> See Alexander Cockburn, 'Bush and P.C.—A Conspiracy So Immense', *The Nation*, 27 May 1991.

various groups they are used to talking *about* are now represented in their classrooms and must henceforth be spoken *to*. To PC's attackers, however, all of these cases are symptoms of the same deep malaise that has led to pressure for a multicultural curriculum. In a bid to split the Left and represent a humane centre, the anti-PC campaign has summed up the whole in the image of a tense, humourless 'thought police' (the phrase appears on *Newsweek's* cover), backed up by new university statutes and zealous administrators, that is supposedly ruling all aspects of university life with an iron hand. Syndicated columnist George Will speaks characteristically of 'a war of aggression against the Western political tradition and the ideas that animate it. The aggressors, having been trounced in the real-world politics of the larger society, are attempting to make campuses into mini-states that do what the Western tradition inhibits real states from doing: imposing orthodoxies.'<sup>4</sup>

### A McCarthyism of the Left?

This is not how it is. Accusations of a 'McCarthyism of the Left' (the phrase comes from Stephan Thernstrom, a Harvard historian whose 'case' has received a great deal of publicity) ignore what McCarthyism was and did.<sup>5</sup> Who has lost a teaching job for alleged racism? When has the US government subpoenaed gay-bashers or their drinking companions? On today's campuses, as Catherine Stimpson writes, 'no books have been burnt . . . No professors have been marched through a quad wearing dunce caps. No US Senator has stood up holding a list of "racists" and "sexists" in higher education.'<sup>6</sup> Much of the backlash against women and minorities today not only goes undisciplined, but is generously funded by rightist foundations—as *The Dartmouth Review* was funded while Dinesh D'Souza (described by Alexander Cockburn as 'the Ahab of the PC hunt') was its editor-in-chief. In that period, an interview with a former leader of the Ku Klux Klan was illustrated with a staged photograph of a lynching on the Dartmouth campus; the slogan 'The only good Indian is a dead Indian' ran on the back page; and documents were stolen and printed which revealed the homosexuality of Dartmouth students who did not want it made public. Where are the PC police when you need them?<sup>7</sup> As for the lighter charge of humourlessness, it may be worth pointing out that the phrase 'political correctness' was revived in US leftist circles as a piece of preventive irony, gently jesting away any temptation to a holier-than-thou purism. Until the Right picked it up and ran with it, I myself had never heard it used in anything *but* an ironic sense.

But the joke is now at the expense of the Left. By focusing the fight on 'freedom of speech' versus codes of 'correctness', the term 'PC' has enabled the news media to forget their own craven surrender to the

<sup>4</sup> George Will, 'Curdled Politics on Campus', *Newsweek*, 6 May 1991, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in D'Souza, p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Stimpson, 'New "Politically Correct" Metaphors Insult History and Our Campuses', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 29 May 1991, A-10.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Menand, 'Illiberalisms', *The New Yorker*, 20 May 1991, p. 101. Note that Arabs can still be presented as inscrutable Orientals, as in Bertolucci's *The Shattering Sky*, without the slightest murmur of public complaint, let alone cries of 'racism'.

information control of the military during the Gulf War while also mining a rich vein of populist irritation at what seems to be hyper-specialized jargon broken loose from its academic enclave and running amok in public places. Under the headline 'Are You Politically Correct?' in *New York Magazine*, readers are menaced with a flood of newfangled misdeemeanours and shibboleths: 'Am I Misogynistic, Patriarchal, Gynophobic, Logocentric? Am I Guilty of Racism, Sexism, Classism? Do I Say "Indian" Instead of "Native American"? "Pet" Instead of "Animal Companion"?'<sup>8</sup> Hearing the term 'animal companion', who will stay to discover that 'logocentric' actually belongs to a critique of the race-and-gender essentialism of which PC stands accused? If 'pet' is dead, then everything is permitted. To denounce PC is to mobilize a visceral Orwellian wrath against the supposed violation of ordinary language, identifying the status quo with a reassuringly familiar vocabulary, and inducing resentment and ridicule toward anyone trying to change either the words or the things.

Though most of the articles on PC lead with the McCarthyism issue, the real controversy is not over free speech but over the recent, still fragile, change in dominant attitudes that these changing habits of speech reflect and encourage. To the extent that the PC campaign's nervously scattered volleys have a single target, it is the dominant attitude that, in the view of the attackers, translates an exaggerated respect for women, minorities, and Third World cultures into a militant disrespect for 'Western culture'. The classics of Western culture are being eliminated from the curriculum, they charge, on the grounds that they were written by DWEMs—Dead White European Males. They are being replaced with texts whose only claim to consideration is their racial or gender origin. The common has given way to the particular. Western culture's standards of rational inquiry and interpretation are being subverted in favour of a chaotic free-for-all in which no one can say that any idea, text, or interpretation is better than any other. At the same time, standards of admission to universities are being subverted by affirmative action to recruit minority students and faculty.

This caricature of the movement to reform the content of humanities education comes about as close to the reality as the charge of McCarthyism does. The argument that the Western tradition can be junked is generally considered as laughable in academic circles as the suggestion that all interpretations are equally valid. In spite of challenges to 'Great Books' courses at places like Stanford and Columbia, and a more general insistence that previously excluded cultures should be read and discussed alongside the work of the DWEMs, Plato is still being taught at least as much as before—which was not much. (When someone argues that the Japanese build better cars because they read more Plato, perhaps he'll be read with more enthusiasm.) Black women writers are still assimilated into the canon in large part not for their real virtues but because they kill tokenism's two birds with one economical stone. The routine work of interpreting and transmitting culture goes on; grades continue to be awarded. Minorities are still grossly underrepresented.

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<sup>8</sup> John Taylor, 'Are You Politically Correct?', *New York Magazine*, 21 January 1991

## Re-evaluating the Academic Left

So how should academic radicals (tenured or not), along with the many other academics who feel professionally targeted by the same antagonists, respond to this wave of public defamation? It is tempting simply to declare that the monster of 'political correctness' is 'largely imaginary',<sup>9</sup> a 'figment of overheated imaginations' in rightist think tanks.<sup>10</sup> 'Yes,' writes Michael Berube in *The Village Voice*, 'we plot no less than the destruction of the West. Just the other day a friend and I came up with the most pernicious scheme to date for toppling the West: he will kneel behind the West on all fours. I will push it backwards over him.'<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, there is reason to mix amusement with more serious scrutiny. Most popular treatments of McCarthyism, like the recent film *Guilty By Suspicion*, evade or play down the actual presence of Communists and other leftists in universities and in Hollywood during the fifties. It is easier to deplore the persecution of the innocents than to defend those who, by existing criteria, were 'guilty'. Similarly, when those who cry out against a 'new McCarthyism' find leftists in front of every blackboard, engaged in nothing less than 'cultural revolution', it is easier to chuckle at the inaccuracies, especially the wildly inflated estimate of our numbers and importance, than to use this public exposure as a chance to check who, what and where we actually are. The *New York Times* review of *The Hollow Men*, a second salvo from Charles Sykes, the author of *Profscam* (1988), belittles the book's nostalgia for a complacent era of educational privilege but concludes: 'Mr. Sykes worries about the impact of Marxist professors. I find it difficult to view them as a serious threat to students or to the body politic.' The impression 'that young American literary critics were occupying and despoiling Kuwait City' was perhaps exaggerated.<sup>12</sup> But Mr Sykes does have something to worry about, and our purpose should not be to reassure him.

In *Tenured Radicals* (1990), Roger Kimball argues that 'yesterday's student radical is today's tenured professor or academic dean... the radical vision of the sixties has not so much been abandoned as internalized by many who came of age then and who now teach at and administer our institutions of higher education.'<sup>13</sup> This is much the same story that is often told by the Left itself, though in a very different register. For Russell Jacoby, for example, the academicization of former student activists and intellectuals has meant the cooptation of the sixties generation and the disappearance of US intellectuals as such. The villain of *The Last Intellectuals* is in its subtitle, 'The Age of Academe': 'In the end it was not the New Left intellectuals who invaded the universities but the reverse: the academic idiom, concepts, and concerns occupied, and finally preoccupied, the young left

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<sup>9</sup> Cockburn, p. 685.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Walker, 'Conservatives Invent PC Threat to Silence Opposition on Campus', *The Daily Californian*, 16 May 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Berube, 'Public Image Limited: Political Correctness and the Media's Big Lie', *The Village Voice*, 18 June 1991, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> Berube, p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> Kimball, p. xiv

intellectuals.<sup>14</sup> Compare the two versions. Kimball is surely wrong to think that 'the radical vision of the sixties' has survived its slow academicization unscathed. A quarter-century later, that decade's often naive Third Worldism has been drastically revised; in the most respected academic work on post-colonial themes, the application to the Third World of the full 'new social movements' agenda—race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so on—tends to preclude any simple opposition between Imperial Villains and Newly Independent Heroes. But, in recognizing that anti-imperialism in 'institutions of higher education' is indeed an institutional and political reality, Kimball is closer to the truth than Jacoby, who sees in academic leftism only the extinction of the intellectuals and the eclipse of the Left. For all the Right's efforts to trivialize its enemies (George Will speaks, for example, of 'the striking of poses and the enjoyment of catharsis' in a 'theater of victimization', a 'petty politics drained of normal political content and refilled with the gas of moral vanity', and so on),<sup>15</sup> it accuses them of corrupting the country's youth and winning over administrators in the country's most prestigious universities. It treats them as a power in the world.

This is a lesson the Left has yet to learn. If the Right is evidently motivated to exaggerate the powers of its enemies for rhetorical effect, let us not forget that the academic Left, precisely as an *academic* Left, is itself motivated on the contrary to play down those powers. For the academy in the US, left or not, has traditionally rationalized its existence by setting itself up in holier-than-thou opposition to the sordidness of getting and spending; its claim was to be righteous *because* disempowered. (To the limited extent that the verbal and ideological fastidiousness complained of in PC is real, it is probably attributable as much to Emerson and Arnold as to Fanon and Foucault.) All this public exposure is accomplishing something, then; it is forcing the academic Left to see itself as *more* than merely academic.

### New Constituencies

The Left can also learn from its attackers where its modest but real worldly powers come from. When a PC-basher like Dinesh D'Souza lashes out, seriatim, at admissions standards at Berkeley (affirmative action for African-Americans and Hispanics), at multiculturalism as the content of curricular reform, and at poststructuralist theory, his targets seem to be united only by their common defiance of 'standards'. But they are also united by their common appeal to the principle of *constituency*. The Right acknowledges this, if unconsciously, when it blames fidelity to race, gender and sexual orientation both for the curtailment of free speech and for undervaluation of the Western classics, and even occasionally for that epistemological wariness and relativizing of value that it mislabels 'deconstruction'. The academic Left has had less to say about constituency—perhaps because to speak of it is to trace the Left's own peculiar origin and character.

<sup>14</sup> Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals. American Culture in the Age of Academe*, New York 1987, p. 141.

<sup>15</sup> Will, *Newsweek*, 22 April and 6 May 1991.

University administrators could be won over by the Left, it would seem, in part because the Left had student support. But why should students at the end of the Cold War suddenly start responding favourably to what George Will calls a 'watery Marxism'?<sup>66</sup> Part of the answer seems to lie in the wateriness, or the other diluting agents that commentators have proposed: literariness, 'eclecticism', 'warmed-over Nietzscheanism'. 'What we are witnessing on the campus today,' Irving Howe writes in *The New Republic*, 'is a strange mixture of American populist sentiment and French critical theorizing as they come together in behalf of "changing the subject"'. The populism provides an underlying structure of feeling and the theorizing provides a dash of intellectual panache. The populism releases anti-elitist rhetoric, the theorizing releases highly elitist language.'<sup>67</sup> Howe invokes Lenin and Trotsky to argue that the populism is not Marxist at all, but a revival of twenties Proletkult. If so, this is a Proletkult without the proletariat; class is clearly not the primary category. But there is no doubt about Howe's insight that the current moment is defined by the strange combination of elitist 'French theory' and Proletkult-like loyalty to the principle of constituency.

The same point comes through in another crude, hostile sketch: 'Politically, PC is Marxist in origin, in the broad sense of attempting to redistribute power from the privileged class (white males) to the oppressed masses. But it is Marxism of a peculiarly attenuated, self-referential kind. This is not a movement aimed at attracting more working-class youths to the university. The failure of Marxist systems throughout the world has not noticeably dimmed the allure of left-wing politics for American academics...Intellectually, PC is informed by deconstructionism.'<sup>68</sup> White males? The suggestion is not only that this is the constituency and the politics (in Dinesh D'Souza's subtitle) of 'Race and Sex', but more important, that there is a constituency—even for something as weighdelessly theoretical as 'deconstruction'. In this view, a 'peculiarly attenuated' and 'self-referential' Marxism, making some sort of epistemological common cause with deconstruction, comes to seem the single and perhaps inevitable umbrella term that covers and joins together student and faculty constituencies whose primary allegiances are not to class but to the 'new social movements': gender (60 per cent of American college students are now women), race, sexual orientation, and so on. For better or worse, this Marxism is 'attenuated' and 'self-referential' because it represents the plural, multicultural perspectives of its constituents. It is perhaps only in this 'watery' form that it could come to hold such a sway as it does in the American academy.

Some would say, of course, that this 'postmodern Left' is hardly a Left at all.<sup>69</sup> The weakness for purely epistemological politics, the occasional retreat into particularism, the symbolic games in which one oppression is trumped by a still more onerous oppression—these do

<sup>66</sup> Will, *Newsweek*, 22 April 1991

<sup>67</sup> Irving Howe, 'The Value of the Canon', *The New Republic*, 18 February 1991, p. 42.

<sup>68</sup> Taylor, *Newsweek*, p. 53.

<sup>69</sup> The phrase comes from 'A New Left Hymn for All Voices', *In These Times*, 24 July/6 August 1991, p. 14.

not compose the formula of an ideal left orthodoxy. But it is *less* useful to harp on these imperfections than to seize their unity, in the moment of attack on them, and to understand them as historical by-products of a particular compromise between Marxism and its new constituencies, the Left and the academy, professionalism and solidarity.

It may be that the whole purpose of the PC assault is to extend the Reagan/Bush agenda, taking over or silencing organizations like the National Endowment for the Humanities that fund and therefore set research agendas, and above all preparing the public for a cut in federal funding of higher education. If private industry is asked to foot more of the bill for the universities, it will finance those projects of more direct interest to it, which are unlikely to be concentrated in the humanities. With its unique role in guaranteeing the illusion of equal opportunity, education is also an especially good target for attacks on affirmative action. But even if all the talk about tenured radicals and PC is intended as nothing but a piece of incendiary subterfuge, the various organizations that have been rapidly forming in the US to combat this threat will have to begin by acknowledging certain fundamental truths learned from it: that a Left exists in American universities, that it is staffed by intellectuals who have not ceased to be intellectuals by virtue of their institutional position, and that its fate is vitally connected to the values and purposes of groups outside those institutions.

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## Subcultures and Society

In their Foreword to *Political Shakespeare* Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield give a brief account of 'cultural materialism': a mode of critical analysis which examines both 'high' and 'popular' texts, insists on their implication in history, denies that they have any transcendent meanings, and takes its stand on openly avowed political commitments. Sinfield's recent study, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain*,<sup>2</sup> applies this approach to a range of themes and writings, often foregrounding the work of well-known literary authors (Angus Wilson and Elizabeth Bowen, Sylvia Plath and Philip Larkin, among many others), but attending also to less established figures and to discourses and cultural practices beyond the purview of 'literary criticism' as it used to be conceived. Thus, for instance, the ideologies of child care (Bowlby, Winnicott) and the norms of *The New Yorker* short story ('I would really like to get something in *The New Yorker*': Plath in 1956) are presented as important contexts for Plath's stories and poems, and work by Larkin, Thom Gunn and Kingsley Amis is situated within a broad account of the impact of jazz and popular music on literary intellectuals.

The book's chapters are focused neither on writers or groups of writers, nor on discrete chronological periods, but on a series of cultural shifts, movements and problems: the genealogy of the New Left and of 'left culturism', the reinvention of modernism in the USA, the construction of a male homosexual identity perceived as linked with an 'effete' cultural establishment, and so on. Sinfield's overall thesis is that within the postwar social-democratic settlement ('welfare capitalism'), a notion of 'good culture' was fostered. This, like other good things, was no longer to be the exclusive preserve of the middle and upper classes. Under the tutelage of liberal governors, the population at large was to have an opportunity to enjoy it. As the social and economic aspects of the project have proved unattainable, and as their desirability has been challenged by the New Right, so—argues Sinfield—the concomitant

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1989, £40.00 hbk, £10.95 pbk.



cultural enterprise has come to seem unworkable too. The displacement of 'welfare capitalism' by Thatcherism is regretted (even if the original postwar settlement was never more than a compromise), but the collapse of universalist cultural assumptions is welcomed, although it has involved the downfall of left-liberal aspirations. '“Man” is a powerful concept,' Sinfield writes in a key passage, 'but I cannot regret its loss to the left. A divided society should have a divided culture: an (apparently) unified culture can only reinforce power relations. In many circumstances it may be necessary . . . to defend the arts . . . against new-right assault. But the idea of a universal “good” culture is mystifying and oppressive, and a medium-term project should be to validate instead a range of subcultures.' (p. 300). This defines the book's perspective: the denial (*contra* Raymond Williams, who is nonetheless acknowledged as a major influence) that bourgeois high culture has any power to transcend the class circumstances of its making, and the selection of themes and texts within which 'culture' and 'subculture' are shown to interact. The argument is carried forward much more in detailed exemplification than in general statement of the kind just quoted, and one is persuaded or not on a case-by-case basis. One notes, however, some questions about this programmatic claim. Who, we may ask, is to 'validate' the subcultures: the institution of academic criticism, whose title to do so will hardly survive the process of cultural fission Sinfield describes and applauds?

And the expression 'medium-term project' seems to envisage some eventual wider progressive coalition. The difficulty of combining diverse groups in such a coalition has been often registered: it is a good few years since *Beyond the Fragments*, but we seem still to be left with 'the fragments' on the one hand—and the Labour Party on the other. The point here, and it is not taken up anywhere in the book, is that the socialist values to which Sinfield is committed, and which would be part of the foundation of any such progressive mobilization as he envisages, themselves depend on some notion of universal goods and truths of just the kind that is dismissed in the realm of culture. Under one aspect, then, this is a broad cultural history, contentious but stimulating—especially, it may be, for readers who identify themselves with the left-liberal 'class fraction' which, in this account, has played a central but equivocal role in defining and attempting to transmit 'good culture'.

Under another aspect, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain* is to be seen as an intervention in the academic contest over the future of what was once 'English Literature'. The book exemplifies the shift from 'Englit' (Sinfield's term) to 'cultural studies'. Its range of reference, revealing juxtaposition of texts, and awareness of culture's institutional bases typify the kind of gains that are being made. But there are also ambiguities, evasions and questionable implicit positions where one might have hoped to see a more forthright theoretical engagement. The book eschews debate with other critical schools and methodologies, and offers neither explicit argument nor consistent practice in what is surely a central area: the question of aesthetic value, and thus of how 'literature' might be defined in other than ideological and institutional terms.

The general under-theorization of Sinfield's approach is striking. There is a brief and rather contradictory assessment of postmodernism, but given that Sinfield's own dissolution of humanist universals in many ways parallels postmodernism's deconstructive scepticism, a more careful discrimination of agreements and disagreements would have been in order. The political centrality of feminism is acknowledged, but feminist critical theories are nowhere discussed. Psychoanalytic, semiotic and deconstructionist critical procedures are never reviewed. All this leaves its mark on Sinfield's readings: these are cursory, and tend to deal with texts and univocal ideological messages, flattening their contradictions and leaving complexities largely unexplored.

The one critical school submitted to detailed scrutiny is 'New Criticism', distinguished (rightly in my view) from Leavisism, and associated with the American reinvention of Modernism. Here, dissent from the overly formalistic approach of the New Critics leads too readily into a dismissal of Modernism itself, which is defined as 'a rebellion effectively within the leisure class' (p. 184). We are told that Woolf's celebrated attack on Wells and Bennett (in 'Modern Fiction') amounts to a demand for 'a more conservative kind of writing' (p. 199). Feminist critics—and not only feminist critics—would insist, at this point, that there is also a politics of representation, of form and genre and language. The 'rebelliousness' of *To the Lighthouse* or *Ulysses* inheres in what those texts, through formal and representational innovation, bring to light about consciousness and identity, subjectivity and the social: deeply political themes, but not primarily a matter of the 'content' of the work.

Moreover, formal properties of literary works, which academic literary criticism has (too single-mindedly) striven to elucidate, constitute a distinct aspect of their totality—though one that is in constant interplay with those denotative 'messages' which an ideological and sociological criticism tends (too single-mindedly) to focus on. To suggest that a certain (variably marked) foregrounding of form and pattern distinguishes 'literature' is not to claim that this makes literary works straightforwardly 'transcendent' (though it surely does help to explain the longevity of their readableness). It is not to deny that they transmit messages and ideologies which may largely preoccupy us as we read, or to want to reinstate a timeless canon in the face of the evident and welcome fact that we now read literature in less deferential and more demanding ways. Nor can an aesthetic criterion be our exclusive test for discriminating 'literature', which certainly is, as this book usefully reminds us, a cultural and economic institution as well as a body of 'good writing'.

What matters, as 'cultural materialism' contends with other critical approaches, is that a left analysis avoids occluding these complexities. A politically committed cultural-historical overview can well be combined with a more detailed and multivalent reading of texts and with a fuller engagement with theoretical questions (including the question of aesthetic value) than are found here. Meanwhile, within and beyond the New Left circles to which an important strand in his argument is particularly addressed, Sinfield's book demands attention both for its analysis of the period with which it deals and for its representative importance in a developing body of radical academic work.

BY MEDVEDEV *Politics after the Coup*

# 89 *new left review*

## THE MEANING OF RUSSIA'S REVOLUTION

Fancy Condee

Vladimir Padunov

**Perestroika Suicide**

Joseph McCarney

**The True Realm of Freedom**

Donald Suny

**From Gorbachev to Yeltsin**

Giovanni Arrighi

**The Rich and the Poor**

Uccio Magri

**The Future of the Left**

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**Nationalism in Eastern Europe**

Egelbaum, 'Before Stalinism'; Blackburn, Russia and China

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Russia's August revolution lends a new perspective to the history of this century. It can be seen as a momentous gain for the peculiar species of bourgeois-democratic revolution sweeping the Communist world. The perverse modernization undertaken by the former Soviet regime had reached a dead end and could no longer hope to match capitalist development. Indeed Joseph McCarney argues, in an article which succeeds in being both iconoclastic and classically Marxist, that the expansion of the world market consequent upon the dismantling of the command economies has its dialectically progressive aspect. It is interesting to note that the old order's death rattle—the communique issued by the so-called 'Emergency Committee' on 19 August—attempted to justify itself by invoking the 'centuries old' tradition of the Russian nation and empire but made no reference to socialism, Karl Marx or even Lenin. Nevertheless the Russian victors were themselves former members of, or advisers to, the old *nomenklatura*. It is, perhaps, this fact which helps to explain the largely peaceful character of the overthrow of a political system once notorious for its ruthlessness. In its last decades Soviet development threw up a new elite, demoralized by the performance of the command economy but confident that its own skills would be bankable in a market society.

There was also a general awareness that, as Ronald Suny points out in this issue, the Russian Federation, with its huge natural resources, has generally subsidized the subordinated republics of the Soviet empire, thereby creating a situation where the break-up of the Union promised economic advantages for the metropolis. Russia's new trade unions favoured Yeltsin against the junta, glad to be rid of the old kleptocracy and hoping to guarantee fragile new freedoms. But it is clear to everyone that sustaining the practice of democracy will not be easy.

The August revolution defeated not only the coup but also Mikhail Gorbachev's reform project. Gorbachev's commitment to democratization was real enough, as Zhores Medvedev stressed in NLR 179, but he did not follow it through to the end. He allowed a revolt to develop against the dead weight of the party bureaucracy but failed to make himself its champion. Gorbachev's fatal mistake was to have abstained from seeking a democratic mandate at a time when he might still have won it. Yeltsin first earned popular support by challenging the privileges of the party, and then made himself respectable by appointing economic and

military advisers from the modernizing, pro-bourgeois wing of the state. In this issue Roy Medvedev explains how it was that Gorbachev gradually lost the initiative and allowed others to exploit the incomplete reforms he had introduced. He argues that economic failure and incoherence played a decisive part in undermining support for Gorbachev.

Gorbachev was also weakened, and Yeltsin strengthened, by the rise of demands for independence from the constituent republics of the Union. Gorbachev failed to see that there was no alternative to conceding full self-determination where a clear majority was demanding it. Up until the moment of the coup Yeltsin successfully presented himself both as a champion of those republics that were against Moscow and as a Russian nationalist. In this issue Ronald Suny and Ernest Gellner put the break-up of the Soviet Union in the context of the rise of nationalism in those lands which formerly comprised parts of the Habsburg, Romanov or Ottoman empires. In different ways they argue that the emergence of national communities is inseparable from the experience of modernity and that only the frozen conformism of the 'ideocracy' previously concealed this fact in the former Soviet Union. In a postscript Gellner points out that it was Yeltsin's endorsement of the nationalist revival which enabled him to finesse the power of the centre. However, we should note that while most of the non-Russian republics wish to put their Soviet past behind them, only the most reckless and irresponsible challenge the internal borders bequeathed by the old Union. As Ronald Suny observes, the old Union structures were in themselves a sort of incubator for national sentiment, shaping the institutions of civil society on which national movements would rise. In at least this vital area respect for the legacy of the old order is necessary to both peace and democracy; if these internal regional and republican borders are changed it should only be by mutual consent.

Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov furnish a spirited portrait of Russian culture in the era of glasnost. They argue that the rise of street capitalism and the 'guerrilla commodity' managed to outflank and defeat not only officialdom, with its approved doses of high culture, but also the giants of political dissidence. The sales of works of detective fiction, treatises on the occult, and manuals of eroticism rose vertiginously, while classics of literature and protest gathered dust on the shelves. However, in the newspapers and journals there has been a welcome rebirth of the irreverent and satirical strain in Russian culture, resistant to new pieties as well as old orthodoxies. Though 'Perestroika Suicide' was written

prior to the events of last August, it vividly evokes the self-liquidating dynamic of a reform project that was more radical than it knew.

✧ Lucio Magri reminds us that Soviet power played a vital part in defeating fascism and colonialism, but because of its Stalinist and post-Stalinist involution and corruption failed to offer a superior model of civilization to the West. Magri, writing as a former leader of the Italian Communist Party, sees no necessity for the Left to abandon socialist principles which Soviet leaders had long ago themselves comprehensively rejected. He argues for a necessary reconstruction of the Left, based on programmatic renewal. He urges the rejection of the economism and paternalism associated with even the most benign variants of social democracy or reform-communism. While he points to new social movements as raising questions of fundamental importance for socialists, he also calls attention to class forces and alignments thrown up by capitalism's own most recent development. In Magri's view a reconstructed Left is needed today more than ever as a rallying point of resistance to a new world order based on yawning inequality, virulent strains of racial conceit, high-tech militarism and unprecedented threats to the habitability of the planet.

✧ Giovanni Arrighi's long-range study of global economic patterns shows the extraordinary rigidity of the relations between a core group of rich nations and the remainder of the capitalist or non-capitalist world. For decades the per-capita GNP of the rich nations has been some fifty times greater than the per-capita GNP of the peoples of the Indian subcontinent. Such dramatic developments as decolonization and Communist revolution have had a surprisingly modest impact on the relative economic performance of the different major world zones. Arrighi shows that even before the recent advance of globalization it was the workings of world-wide circuits of exchange, valorization and credit that determined the limits of national economy. In a world more than ever dominated by capitalism's propensity to generate wealth at one pole and poverty at the other, Arrighi's study has sobering implications.

✧ Samuel Farber's recent critical study of the period *Before Stalinism* argues that Bolshevik practice and principles bear a heavy responsibility for the subsequent evolution of the Soviet regime. It is reviewed in this issue by Lewis Siegelbaum. Finally, Robin Blackburn argues that if Russia's leaders today really want to learn how to transform a command economy into a market economy, they have more to learn from the independent collectives of South China than from the supermarket executives kindly loaned to them by the British government.

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## The European Left Between Crisis and Refoundation

Today we cannot understand anything of Europe, the European Left or any other problem in the world unless we start out, in a spirit of truth, from the epochal shift of the last few years that has resulted in the political, ideological and economic collapse of the Communist states in Eastern Europe.\* It has been an event as overwhelming and as fraught with long-term consequences as the conclusion of the anti-fascist war half a century ago. When the Berlin Wall came down the judgement of many people, especially in Europe, was one of euphoria. They saw the coming of a new historical period marked by world cooperation, disarmament and democratic advance, which would provide a clear opportunity for democratic socialism with a human face. Now we can see that the reality is different and much harsher. Let us be clear. For my own part, I am no orphan of actually existing socialism or the Cold War, nor have I ever looked back at them with nostalgia. I have been active from an early age in a Communist Party, the PCI, which has always striven both theoretically and practically to develop a line independent of the Eastern-

bloc countries. Moreover, twenty years ago I was expelled from the party with the Manifesto Group—a long exclusion due to our openly argued position that we were witnessing a social and political degeneration of the regimes in the East, and that they could not be reformed without a radical break. If I mention this, it is not only to explain why I feel neither surprised nor contradicted by the present crisis, which I regard as inevitable and in many ways a liberation. It is also to recall that an earlier crisis, at the time of our expulsion, did not appear to herald defeat, but rather to constitute the great historic opportunity for a theoretical and practical leap forward by a revolutionary movement that based itself on the major gains of the preceding epoch. Those were the times, we should remember, of anti-imperialist struggle in the Third World, of the student and workers' movements of 1968 in the West, the Prague Spring and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. In both East and West that attempt to move forward did not reach fulfilment, but nor did it end in rapid failure.

## 1. An Epochal Turning Point

The present crisis of the Left is occurring under the dual impact of capitalist restructuring, with all its economic and cultural results, and the collapse of the planned economies. It bears the marks of both. The events of the last few weeks in the Soviet Union confirm this. It is true that the worst has been avoided: namely, the success of a coup d'état which was so resoundingly devoid of social consent or ideological bases that it would have had to engage in mass repression before arriving at a regime at once authoritarian and impotent. Nevertheless, the outcome is not a revival of Gorbachev's original aim of self-reform of the Soviet system, but the taking of power by a new social bloc and a new political leadership that have radically broken with the October Revolution and everything it produced.

These dangers, with all their short-term costs for that region of the world, have become visible to everyone through the events in outlying lands of the USSR. At least in a first phase, we shall see not economic development and representative democracy, so much as production crises, mass unemployment and violent outbursts of nationalism—a democratic revolution accompanying and producing social restoration, disaggregation of the state structure of a large nuclear power, and rapid introduction of an unbridled capitalism which, for the time being, is more likely to follow the Brazilian than the German pattern.

But the purpose of my contribution is not to make analyses, judgments or predictions about that whole development in the East, for which I anyway lack the necessary competence. What I wish to stress here are the general, long-term elements that follow for the world order, and their repercussions on political and social struggle well beyond the frontiers of the USSR.

Firstly, a historical experience is now ending in painful defeat—an experience which, both materially and in terms of ideas, served

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\* This is the text of a lecture given on 14 September 1991 in São Paulo to a seminar convened by the Instituto Cajamar and the Workers Party (PT).

sometimes as a model and in any case as a reference point for broad movements of liberation. It is now fashionable in the West, even on the Left, to treat that connection as a thoroughly harmful product of manipulation or folly—that is, to consider the October Revolution and its sequel not as a process which degenerated in stages but as a regression *ab origine*, or a pile of rubble. But the historical reality is rather different. First Stalinism, then the authoritarian power of a bureaucratic, imperial caste, were one side of that historical process, and we were wrong not to have seen its effects in time and denounced it in its roots. But for decades another side also continued to operate: the side of national independence; the spread of literacy, modernization and social protection across whole continents; the resistance to fascism and victory over it as a general tendency of capitalism; support for and actual involvement in the liberation of three-quarters of humanity from colonialism; containment of the power of the mightiest imperial state. First the involution and then the collapse of all that has direct and weighty consequences for the Left throughout the world. For the oppressed, it means the passing away not so much of a model—mistakenly held and now generally discarded—as of an ally and a support. And with it is going a legacy of cultural autonomy which the common sense of Marxism, in its most diverse forms, deposited in the world much more widely and deeply than in the Communist parties alone.

Secondly, there is a radical change in the relationship of forces or geography of power in international relations, especially after the recent developments in Moscow. A great power and its system of alliances have now dissolved, giving way not to a secure, polycentric world equilibrium, but to the complete supremacy of a group of major capitalist powers centred on the United States of America. Conflicts of interest are certainly taking shape among them, but they are firmly united in their economic structure and show a clear determination to rule the world by their own lights, by force where economic and cultural supremacy do not suffice. The mounting of the Gulf War, the current shifts in NATO towards a world police force, the management of international economic institutions and so-called aid programmes, US policy in Central and South America or European in Africa—all these demonstrate what kind of world government is at issue.

The Left throughout the world, even that part of it which never had anything to do with the ideology and organization of actually existing socialism, is inevitably affected by such trends, both in terms of the objective conditions and relationships of force that it has to face, and in terms of the internalization of defeat.

### Stalled Projects

Let us look now at the Left of Western Europe, which entered into major difficulties independently of the new turn in the East. In fact, these were already apparent towards the end of the 1970s, when economic crisis and the capitalist response through restructuring put intense strains on the political platform, the instruments of intervention and the social basis around which the Left had for decades

defined its presence and its role—that is to say, the construction and management of the welfare state, the redistribution of income and the implementation of Keynesian policies of demand support and full employment, the strength and bargaining-power of trade unions, and the regulatory function of the national state.

The European Left reacted to these difficulties in two different ways which, no longer coinciding with the distinction between Communists and Socialists, passed through both formations at the same time. A number of large parties with a major working-class and popular implantation (PCI, SPD, Labour Party, for example) engaged in a real effort of political and cultural rethinking, in order to define, as it were, a more advanced left-reformism revolving around questions of ecological reconversion, economic democracy and disarmament. Other forces, however, set out to retain a role in government by aligning themselves more clearly with neo-conservative policies and by shifting their own social base and organizational forms in the direction of an American-style, inter-class party of opinion. This was the case of the French, Spanish and Italian Socialist parties.

The first of these two courses gradually ran up against the world context that we outlined at the beginning. But the subjective limits also proved to be stronger than expected: long habits of administering power which had produced leadership groups strongly integrated into the dominant apparatuses and culture; a weak capacity to foster and support mass movements; a deeply ingrained Eurocentric culture. The project therefore came to a halt in mid course, having achieved rather slender results, and in the most important countries is now ebbing into a much more pragmatic attempt to move back closer to government, even at the price of renouncing major points in its programme and allying with conservative forces.

All this has been clearly visible in relation not only to the Gulf War and rearmament but also to social policy, although it has not been enough to restore the electoral fortunes of the parties of the Left. For on the terrain of neo-conservative policies, it is naturally the Right which has the greater credibility. Moreover, as the working classes come to feel less involved and less represented, they distance themselves from politics and often from the ballot, or express opposition through localist or outright racist movements. The political system is thus tending to become more uniform, incapable of expressing conflicts and contradictions present within society or of drawing up real alternatives. There are certainly new movements (ecologism, feminism, pacifism, for example) which are sometimes strong enough to penetrate traditionally conservative sectors like the Catholic or the Protestant Church and to exert an influence on the parties of the Left. But they are not able, in any stable or significant measure, to produce a new culture and organization that will unite with broad masses of workers and marginal layers.

I have neither the task nor the competence to say whether, how and to what degree this same difficulty of the international context is also expressed in the other major component of the progressive front of

past decades, namely, the Third World. But it seems evident that, however diverse the effects, they are generating tendencies to subaltern integration of the ruling classes—sometimes also of their more progressive sectors—and forcing countries and peoples that cannot or will not undergo integration to seek a line of resistance in adventurist nationalism or religious fundamentalism, as has often happened in the Arab world. This fuels and aggravates the vicious circle of non-communication between the Northern and Southern Lefts—a phenomenon that has always existed, but which at certain moments, and within very definite limits, has been overcome by broad movements of solidarity.

I have intentionally and perhaps too much underlined the distressing side of things, because it is necessary to start by facing reality if we are to rebuild a culture and politics of the Left. As is always the case, we can certainly recognize and appreciate other elements that are already in play: the upheavals in the East also involve an extraordinary explosion of democratic participation that will bear its fruits; the social-democratic model in Western Europe cannot be conflated with that of the USA or Japan and has certain left forces and cultures that could provide a new starting-point; many countries in the Third World (particularly in Latin America and South Africa) are still witnessing popular struggles and the emergence of new subjects, and some of these are achieving successes. But such features have to be placed within a general framework, an overall relationship of forces where another sign is dominant. As Lukács wrote shortly before his death, the analogy that should be drawn is with the middle of the last century rather than with the beginning of our own. Once again, a revolution that changed the world has reached a point of crisis; and again it is upon the contradictory materials left behind that a new historical phase of the struggle for the transformation of society and the emancipation of the oppressed has to be built. This will require not only resistance to a ruling-class hegemony that now seems to be regaining its composure, but also a difficult process of shaping partly new ideas, actors and contradictions. Do the conditions exist for that work of reconstruction, for opposition to the dominant system not just at the level of ideas or individual witness, but in terms of organized mass politics? And does it still make sense today to refer to Marxism, communism and class struggle as useful, if not exclusive and self-sufficient, instruments for such a project? I believe that the answer to both questions is Yes—not because of some moral choice, but on rational grounds that I would now like to present briefly and rather schematically.

## 2. The Actuality of a Radical Critique of Capitalism

In my view the world today—its most modern and dynamic aspects, and not only its areas of backwardness and stagnation—makes a profound critique of the capitalist social system at once necessary and possible. Indeed it is only today, for the first time, that such a critique can be expressed in a radical form pointing concretely towards emancipatory change.

For the first time, humanity has the resources and productive capacity

to assure the satisfaction of basic needs and a minimum of civilization for all. And yet, a growing part of humanity—whole peoples and continents in the South, but also a not insignificant part of the affluent metropolis—are enduring old and new forms of poverty, fighting and often losing the battle for sheer survival.

For the first time, humanity is running up against the limits of natural resources. It has the scientific and technological means to husband those resources and to pursue greater well-being through improvements in the quality of life rather than senseless growth in the quantity of material goods. But the dissipation of nature is continuing, in some sectors actually accelerating, and with it a model of life that promises disasters in the future and is already undermining human welfare.

For the first time, at least in the North, consumption levels have passed the threshold of natural need: they now allow both for real enrichment of distinctively human consumption and for the satisfaction of remaining needs. Instead, however, the repetitive, imitative and depersonalized character of consumption is becoming more marked, without either satisfying existing needs or creating higher ones.

For the first time, as a result of the scope and pace of technological innovation, it is becoming possible and almost obligatory to reduce the sum total of necessary human labour and to set greater store by its quality. And yet, the reduction in necessary labour is translated into structural unemployment, and an even greater separation is made between stable, skilled labour and insecure, fragmentary, alienating tasks.

For the first time, education and rapid communications offer the means for a general rise in culture and critical awareness, which are in turn the basis for any real democracy. Yet they are turning into instruments of manipulation, of a conformist common sense, disorienting the masses and rendering them passive.

For the first time, then, modernity and progress do not appear as synonyms of civilization and equality, however uneven or gradual in their development, but are threatening to open the way to a caste society and general barbarism. It may be asked what all this has to do with capitalism as a system. Are we not talking of problems which overshadow the capital-labour conflict or the relationship between property and power? We have very good reasons to doubt that this is so. There are not a few contradictions directly or indirectly bound up with capitalist exploitation of labour which are by no means marginal and all too painfully material. Some examples: the debt and interest burden and the unequal exchange between raw materials and industrial goods in relations between North and South; the cost of labour in the developing countries; the earnings hierarchy, low pay and intensity of labour in the advanced core itself; the injustices and exemptions built into the tax system; the inequalities in the actual distribution of public services; and the proportional remuneration of labour, capital and financial assets. All these contradictions not only persist but have started to grow again in the course of the last decade.

If we look at the newer contradictions, which cannot so easily be situated within the immediate conflict between classes, it is certainly true that underdevelopment in the South no longer results only from the transfer of resources from periphery to metropolis, nor is it imposed only by military domination. But is it not true that underdevelopment, like never before, is tied to a certain kind of *subaltern integration*, to the power of finance capital, to the trading policies imposed by dominant states, and above all to the type of technological development and consumption which big capital, and the market regulated by it, impose with a coercive power greater than that of any gunboat?

Of course, the environmental disaster is not only due to capitalist choices. But is it not quite impossible to effect a solution so long as the key parameter of production decisions remains short-term corporate profit, and the guiding priority for economics, research or even individual behaviour is growth in the number of goods to be produced and consumed in an individual manner?

Of course, the hierarchy of social roles depends rather less directly than before on the ownership of property, and more on specialist knowledge and the talents required to exploit it. But is it not true that such capacities are one-sidedly shaped and subordinated by extrinsic priorities; that the power to define them comes mainly from ownership of capital and its goal of unlimited growth, which increasingly stamp the very character of technology and research?

I could go on adding to the examples. But there already seems enough evidence to support two conclusions. First, even those phenomena which appear quite remote from the capital-labour conflict over distribution of the social product are tightly bound up with the powerful mechanisms regulating the capitalist economy. Secondly, modern triumphant capitalism, like never before, displays the features of overall irrationality, including in the economy itself. For what else can one say of a subject which, having largely met certain needs and seen the emergence of new ones that have still to be satisfied, devotes ever more material and human resources to the former; a subject which is not capable of steering its own choices towards goals generally recognized as essential?

### The Obstacles to Advance

Despite the incessant campaign conducted by apologists of capitalism, all this is present in the consciousness of many people, at least in a large part of the Left and of European culture in general. But it has to face two basic obstacles. First of all, the objective mechanism of the unified international market, with its huge multinational concentrations that dominate capital, research and the media, constitutes a dense and powerful force paralleling the crisis of national states, parliaments and organized democracy. This force is now such as to render vain and impotent any reform-oriented politics that is incapable of reaching a critical mass of innovations with which to operate, at least at the level of continents, a diverse and coherent system of accords and to resist the inevitable counter-attacks.

Secondly, any reform-oriented politics will suffer from the weakness of its potential base of support, apparent in the decline of large factories, the corporate segmentation of social interests, the inherently dispersed and fluctuating character of the new movements, and the contradictions of culture and interests that develop among them. In order to overcome these, such a new politics would as a whole have to achieve a large degree of cultural autonomy, as well as organizational changes and a clarity and consistency of programme. The point I wish to stress, however, is that this presupposes a radical transformation, a true refounding, not just for Communists but for all the forces involved. In particular, it will be necessary to develop beyond certain notions which, though marking socialism in the Eastern bloc, prove on closer inspection to have been held in common throughout the history of the workers' movement.

These defective notions may be summarized under four headings. *Economism* identified progress with quantitative growth of (especially industrial) production, thereby underestimating other than directly economic moments and dimensions in the appraisal of individual and collective life. *Statism* overemphasized the role of centralized political power, state ownership of the means of production, and abolition of the market by decree as a lever of socialist transformation, instead of laying the stress on self-government and intellectual-moral reform in the construction of a new hegemony. *Jacobinism* separated off the Party, as enlightened vanguard, from the masses, and thus entailed a bureaucratic organizational form of the party itself. *Eurocentrism* involved the idea that the Western model could be extended world-wide, defining the social subjects and cultures of other peoples in terms of underdevelopment and reducing them to the rank of mere allies. This whole complex of mentalities helped to produce degeneration in societies where a revolution was accomplished, but it has also hindered the Western Left from uniting with Third World movements and from mobilizing the new social subjects that are emerging under advanced capitalism.

Of course, such a way of thinking about socialism as a social process has not appeared out of thin air. In Marx's own theory, and in many strands of Marxism (Gramsci, Lukács or Korsch, for example), there was certainly a conception of communism and socialism grounded on the critique of quantitative growth, the social division of labour and delegate democracy. It is no accident that some like myself continue to affirm their communist identity by referring precisely to these Marxian roots.

Evidently that other tradition remained marginal in the actual history of the workers' movement, unable either to achieve adequate theoretical expression or to produce an effective politics. The world today, however, does allow and is even compelling us towards a new definition of theory and practice, in which cultures and experiences outside Marxism or the workers' movement will make an indispensable contribution. There is certainly nothing fortuitous in the role of advanced Catholic currents in Latin America, or of ecology, feminism and the peace movement in Europe.



f The objective conditions and an embryonic subjectivity therefore exist for the reconstruction of a Left in opposition to the present system, and a revolutionary project in which democracy and socialism are joined together. It is a long and far from simple task, and it will have a chance of success only if we do not linger over nostalgic orthodoxies or delude ourselves that the confused, spontaneous growth of conflictual moments is sufficient to produce an alternative. All the evidence today indicates that, without an organized political theory and practice, new movements will arise but only to be defeated, in such a way that the system recovers with greater strength than before. Precisely because socialism can no longer be separated from democracy, it has all the more need of awareness, programmes, organization and education.

### 3. Opportunities of the Current Phase

f Even if we accept that all these considerations are correct, perhaps adding others along similar lines, they do not yet provide a minimum basis with which to orient the Left and to rebuild faith in its immediate political future. Effective political action of a mass character requires more than just a strategic perspective and an identity at the level of ideas; it cannot operate only in the *longue durée*, with regard to epochal contradictions. It must also take up position in a determinate short-term future, and acquire leverage over immediate contradictions and forces that are already in play.

✱ In fact, one of the most frequent and costly errors in the history of the workers' movement has been to confuse historical actuality with an immediate political perspective. Even great thinkers could, like Marx, see the Paris Commune as the beginning of the socialist revolution or, like Lenin, argue that the October Revolution would rapidly spread to Western Europe. In 1968 the same mistake was committed in an even more naive and unjustified manner.

The conviction that there are profound objective reasons for the reconstruction of a worldwide anti-capitalist movement should not, therefore, lead us to forget that the present situation does not immediately promise any revolutionary opportunities. All it allows is the defence of certain spaces, the accumulation of forces, the achievement of some partial gains, in a long and tortuous process that will necessitate alliances, intermediate stages and realistic programmes.

This takes us on to a second question. Do the objective and subjective conditions exist today for the building of a left-wing politics that will have immediate effects? In this brief report I cannot even attempt to give an answer: that would require not general assertions but concrete analyses of the economic and political situation, differentiated by country and sector. I can, however, underline the essential factors which, in my view, allow us to be reasonably confident that the Left will revive in a not too distant future—or, in other words, the grounds upon which the Left can rebuild mass support and forge new alliances.

*(i) The Growing Economic Crisis*

First, a critical point is again looming up in the economic crisis, despite the headlong processes of restructuring that have already had their effect.

- It is a crisis that began in the mid seventies with the exhaustion of the Fordist-Keynesian cycle, on which there already exists an abundant literature. The system reacted with three successive responses, each solving some problems whilst creating others. The first period (1974-79) was characterized, so to speak, by 'renewal in continuity'. While strong pressure was brought to bear on wages and labour organization so as to restore eroded profit margins, governments and employers tried to keep the old growth mechanism in place by maintaining demand and recycling into investment capital the resources set loose by the oil crisis. This policy successfully contained the recessionary spiral but also set off the various restructuring processes: the take-off of the so-called NICs in the Third World, the reduction of wage costs, and the launching of industrial conversion in the West with moves towards new technologies and decentralization of production. But this was not enough either to restore the conditions for profitable investment or to put an end to inflation, and it left behind a mountain of internal and external debt that could not easily be repaid. A second phase then followed when the Reagan administration imposed a general clampdown on credit and social expenditure, with the aim of reducing employment, selecting out the fittest companies, and forcing the debtor countries to keep up repayments. This shock therapy produced rapid results, but it also unleashed the biggest depression since the war and brought the system to the brink of collapse.

After 1983 the Reagan administration closely stuck to three of these policy planks: the containment of social expenditure, deregulation of the labour market, and pressure on Third World debt. At the same time, however, it made a 180-degree turn in relation to internal demand by boosting military spending, consumer credit and tax relief—a kind of conservative neo-Keynesianism, financed not by the issuing of money but by expansion of the public debt at high rates of interest. An extraordinary seven-year conjuncture of growth, in which new jobs were created in the non-productive sector and financial miracles were regularly performed, thus allowed the United States to live beyond its means, while providing a market outlet for European and Japanese industry and high-interest income for financial investors. But there was a very high price to be paid, not only in social terms (mass unemployment, for example) but also for the economy as a whole. The United States, suffering deindustrialization and an overall decline in productivity and savings potential, ran up a public debt of \$3,000 billion as well as a colossal trade deficit. More drastically, in the Third World a squeeze on internal consumption and new investment was required merely to keep up interest payments. And even Europe, dragged along the road of high interest-rates, was forced to deepen its export dependency and to widen its own regional imbalances.

Now the chickens are coming home to roost. A recession spreading

out from the United States to the other developed countries is already on the horizon, driven by the unsustainable weight of financial profits, the expansion of parasitic or low-productivity sectors of the metropolitan economies, and the general slowdown in the developing countries. As to the former Eastern bloc, now in free fall, it will be a long time before it offers any promise of new markets and opportunities for guaranteed profits, and its compelling short-term need of financial support will actually diminish the supply of capital on the international market and exert a further upward pressure on interest rates.

The crisis, then, is not simply a conjunctural phenomenon: it is rooted in the assertive thrust by a new social bloc of unearned income and capitalist profit, which has replaced the labour-capital bloc of the Fordist phase and will prove very hard to dismantle. The wrestling match of the coming years has already begun over who will pay the bill for the 'festival' in the West and the collapse in the East and South. And as we can see, the dominant classes will be trying to impose their will in the shape of further cuts in social spending, employment and wages, surgical strikes in the economies of the former Eastern bloc, and final marginalization of the poorest countries from aid programmes.

Such prospects will, or at least may, produce a revival of the basic social conflict between capital and labour, periphery and centre, as well as of contradictions within the dominant bloc between income and profit, between various middle-layer groups, and between the various capitalist powers. Nowhere in the world, including the central heartlands, is it a phase of stability, expansion and social peace that now awaits us.

#### *(ii) Defending Democracy*

The new turning point in the economic crisis is compounded throughout the West by a no less serious problem of the political system and its institutions. For in its hour of apparent triumph, parliamentary democracy is facing a dual crisis of representation and efficacy, one that also goes back nearly twenty years. Its two aspects were the social fragmentation brought about by parasitic degeneration of social spending and bureaucratization of the mass parties and unions, and an unmanageable surplus of social demands in a situation where veto rights acted as a countervailing power but were unable to constitute an alternative. Who does not remember the lucid and reactionary analysis of the Trilateral Commission in the mid seventies, concerning the conflict between democracy and development?

The system sought an answer to that crisis not only through a new distribution of income and power within the economy, but also through a two-pronged neutralization of democratic institutions. On the one hand, the essential political decisions were transferred to sites sheltered from popular sovereignty: to the international institutions (IMF, central banks, European Community) or the multinationals and the centres of private finance. On the other hand, the popular political subject which ought to exercise sovereignty underwent a process of

deconstruction, through manipulation of the media, reshaping of politics as spectacle, promotion of charismatic leaders in place of the mass organizations, and massive use of clientelist or corporatist vote-switching. The sovereign was not just repressed but lobotomized. In this sense, the new-style presidentialism that developed in some Latin American countries (Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Peru) pointed emphatically towards a tendency now operating in the major countries of the West. It is enough to think here of the last presidential campaigns in the United States, or the process of European unification from which parliamentary-democratic representation is completely excluded.

This all worked so well that the system's spontaneous mechanisms became virtually self-sufficient, the only task of political government being to give them the necessary back-up or to mediate their social consequences by distributing financial resources that could still be found on the market. But now we have come to the crucial point. For the capitalist system itself, the new problems in managing the economy and society require that a political authority autonomous from particular interests should be capable of tackling such long-term problems as the public debt, mass unemployment, regional underdevelopment with its growing poverty, criminality and violence, the need for ecological retooling of industry, efficient research and education, and the provision of services to companies. Furthermore, the new mode of assuring electoral consent has become too costly in terms of public assistance and privileges small or large, while the political passivity of wide layers of the population is not only resulting in absenteeism on election day but also creating the potential for localist, nationalist or racist subversion.

In order to assert its grip on the economy and society, the system therefore needs to accentuate still further the oligarchic and repressive character of political power. In many countries, including my own, the signs of this can already be seen. The battle to defend democracy is thus becoming a great opportunity for any Left that is prepared to fight it seriously. But in this battle it is absolutely essential to attack not only the most explicit forms of authoritarianism but also the de facto centres of power such as the information and education apparatuses, the internal company regimes or the international institutions. It has to be fought and won not only in the institutions and at the ballot box but also in the midst of society, through an effort of organization, education and day-to-day struggle that will restore life and autonomy to the sovereign people. In short, it is a battle for real and not just formal democracy, which can also bring together sizeable sectors from the liberal tradition, the religious world and the established political parties.

### *(iii) Cooption and Marginalization*

Finally, although I do not have the time to develop an argument which you anyway know as well as I do, there is the whole field constituted by the struggle for peace, disarmament and the development of the Third and Fourth Worlds. Here, too, we know that the road to a genuine alternative will be long and arduous. But it seems clear to me that today,

as never before, the bases are developing for a conflict between the peoples of the South and the policies of the capitalist metropolis.

There are fundamental, long-term reasons why this is so, such as the model of productive growth and consumption which cannot be extended as such to the whole planet. But there are also a number of immediate issues behind the perspective of conflict: an irrecoverable external debt with a crippling level of interest rates; the support for subaltern privileged classes, for the comprador bourgeoisie and its raging free-tradism; the implementation of protectionist policies in international trade, and so on. The prevailing attitude to the South in the capitalist heartlands is now one of harsher selection: the aim is to coopt a certain fringe of countries and classes, to hasten the marginalization of the whole African continent and of huge masses in Asia or Latin America, and to tackle the ensuing conflicts by means of an armed-to-the-teeth international police. All these trends have been apparent in the Gulf War followed by *Pax Americana* in the Middle East, the strangling of Nicaragua and similar plans for Cuba, and the conversion of NATO into a rapid-deployment force. But apart from the fact that these trends arouse opposition in the South and offend moral sensibilities, they open up quite a few problems within the West itself, where they contradict the tradition of European democracy. Above all, in objective terms, the collapse of the South within a unified world immediately threatens to have a number of catastrophic effects on the North: for example, the environmental disaster (think of Brazil's Amazonian question as a world problem); the further twist in the spiral of militarization; or the biblical migration of labour from South and East towards the West, with all its repercussions in social dumping and cultural racism.

This is the *material* foundation for a new internationalism which, in uniting the European Left and progressive forces in the Third World, could draw in a huge array of political forces and social interests. I do not mean to say that I am expecting another 'new deal' in the near future, or an easy return of the Left to office in Europe on the basis of new ideas and programmes. But I do think that some of the conditions exist for a Left that is serious in intent to constitute a determined opposition of mass proportions (not a sermonizing minority) and to forge a series of genuine alliances.

#### 4. The Old PCI and Communist Refoundation

In conclusion, you might find of interest a few words about what is happening today in the Italian Left, in which I am myself personally involved. The Left in Italy has been represented by a Communist party rather different from others, which until a few years ago regularly won 30 per cent of the vote, with a membership of one and a half million and a strong presence in the unions and local administration.

You will certainly know that at the end of 1989, after the Berlin Wall collapsed, the Secretary of the PCI proposed a change in its name; that a considerable section of the party leadership and rank and file opposed this move in the resolutions it tabled at a special congress; and that

although the opposition was marginal in the party apparatuses, it won the support of a third of the membership, nearly a half in the big cities. What you may not know, however, is that unlike elsewhere this opposition was not, and is not today, characterized by dogmatic, conservative or pro-Soviet positions. Indeed, in Italy the impetus towards a critique of actually existing socialism and research into the new themes of modern capitalism has mainly come from the Left of the party. This Left, then, did not stand against radical renewal but opposed a hasty change of name which would blot out the PCI's independent history, uncritically take on board social-democratic or even liberal traditions and cultures, and above all serve as the accompaniment to a further rightward shift in the party's programme and policies.

The eventual outcome was a crisis and a split. Of the 1.4 million members of the PCI, only 700,000 joined the new party, the PDS. Its electoral support, judging by recent local results, has fallen beneath 20 per cent. In response to this diaspora, others have set themselves the aim of keeping alive a different, refounded communist party—which may be possible at least in Italy. The building of a new organization, whose name precisely is *Rifondazione Comunista*, is now underway, and in a few months it has recruited 150,000 members and averaged 6 per cent of the vote in local elections. At the same time, it intends to keep the broader founding process open to other anti-capitalist forces and movements, and to pursue a unity policy towards other forces on the Left including the Socialist Party and the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS), the only proviso being that they should be serious about their role as an opposition.

The reflections here submitted for your discussion have obviously been made in my personal capacity, because that is the basis on which I was invited. But they largely reflect orientations that were quite widespread in the quest of the old Communist Party, and a fortiori in the one that is seeking a refoundation. I am particularly happy to be able to discuss these matters here with you, for the important political reason that Brazil is today a world vantage point of exceptional interest—both negatively, as an operational model of the animal spirits of unbridled capitalism, and positively, because of the strong presence of a new and combative, militant and creative, Left that you as a party represent. I thank you for inviting me to speak, but more especially for what I will be able to test out and learn from you.

## The True Realm of Freedom: Marxist Philosophy after Communism

This article is an attempt to consider the implications for Marxist philosophy of the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It would be well to start by saying what Marxist philosophy is taken to be here. A convenient map of the field is provided by Alex Callinicos in his Introduction to a recent collection of essays. Confining himself to tendencies which have had a living presence in the West, he distinguishes between Hegelian, Althusserian or structuralist and analytical Marxism.<sup>1</sup> This corresponds pretty closely, one suspects, to the sort of picture most people interested in the matter carry in their heads. Moreover, Callinicos's view of the relations between the various tendencies would have widespread assent. According to it, Hegelian modes of thought, dominant since the nineteen-twenties, were expelled from Marxist theory by Althusser, thereby creating the conditions for analytical Marxism. It is plain that Callinicos sees this as a progressive development, as being, if he would allow the use of the term, a kind of dialectic. It is for him a movement from the Hegelian mists

through the cleansing gales of Althusserianism into the sunlight of analysis. Against this background it may seem merely perverse to seek to undo the verdict of time by returning to the first stage of the triad. For Hegelian Marxism is surely well and truly dead, dead twice over, as it were. Adapting a metaphor from Callinicos, we have, it appears, to accept that its ancient groves have been felled and cleared away by Althusser, leaving the site to be redeveloped by the enterprise of the analytical school. Yet it is just on behalf of this apparently superseded doctrine that the present paper will speak. Indeed, it will seek to represent it as the best theoretical framework for understanding the complexities of the contemporary world.

### Redeeming the Time

There are a number of considerations one might cite to encourage such a project. The first has a somewhat negative force. It is that a satisfactory response to recent events is scarcely to be expected from the other tendencies identified by Callinicos. In the case of Althusserian Marxism the response is likely to be silence, and not silence of the rich, meaningful kind that invites, even as it eludes, interpretation, but simply non-being, a void. The problem, put more literally, is a dearth of committed and articulate interpreters. Callinicos is surely on safe ground in suggesting for the analytical movement a post-Althusserian as well as post-Hegelian character.<sup>2</sup> The difficulty with that movement itself, on the other hand, is that it seems increasingly clear that it is best regarded as an episode in the history of analytical philosophy, a late flowering perhaps, rather than of Marxism. This truth emerges plainly enough, even if unwittingly, from the work of sympathetic commentators. Thus, Callinicos points out that 'analytical Marxists tend to deny much of the substance of Marx's thought.'<sup>3</sup> If words are to have their usual meanings, and, in particular, if 'Marxist' is to retain any identity at all, these deniers of substance should not be included under the rubric of what they deny. To say this, of course, is not itself to make any kind of critical remark, since there can be no intellectual obligation to be a 'Marxist', however the term is defined.

The case for ascribing some special responsibility at the present time to Hegelian Marxism may be put in more positive terms. For this body of thought has a need and a duty to respond to what happens in the world in a way its rivals do not. It is at heart a philosophy of history, a scheme of interpretation that purports to make the course of historical change rationally intelligible. No one has taken the task of assimilating the flux of events, of redeeming it for reason, more seriously than Hegel. At times this commitment finds expression with a literalness verging on the absurd, as in the following words:

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<sup>2</sup> Alex Callinicos, ed., *Marxist Theory*, Oxford 1989, pp. 2-6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 3. On the state of Althusser's reputation, see Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Dancer of Theory*, London 1987, pp. 1-12.

<sup>4</sup> Callinicos, p. 14. For supporting evidence, taking a representative case, see Joseph McCartney, 'Analytical Marxism: A New Paradigm?', in Sean Sayers and Peter Osborne, eds., *Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy: A Radical Philosophy Reader*, London 1990, pp. 169-77.



The morning reading of the newspaper is a kind of realistic morning prayer. It orients one's attitude to the world with respect to God or with respect to what the world is. The latter provides the same security as prayer, in that one knows where one stands.<sup>4</sup>

This attitude might be hard to sustain through the morning engagement with the British press today. Nevertheless, no reader of that press could have been in doubt as to the extraordinary importance of the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe. Indeed, it was mildly surprising how often the Hegelian-sounding phrase 'world history' was invoked in characterizing them. For a philosophy of world history this situation is both an unequalled opportunity and a challenge it cannot evade. It is, one may say, unconditionally obliged to take to itself the injunction '*Hic Rhodus, hic saltus*' of which both Hegel and Marx were so characteristically fond.

It may be that some dialectical categories other than 'world history', which in more ordinary times can appear exotic or uncouth, will now take on a different aspect. In those times their most hardened exponents could scarcely avoid a kind of self-consciousness that hinted at ironic, even comic, possibilities. Now that reality seems, as it were, to be rushing to meet thought the categories of negation, contradiction, mediation and totality may come into their own. It might even be possible to find some respectable use for the notion of *Aufhebung*, a notion so removed from common sense that there is no satisfactory rendering of it in English.<sup>5</sup> At any rate it is evident that Hegelian Marxism has the vocabulary to match its ambition to deal with great events. Whether it will actually succeed in doing so in the present case is a crucial test of the entire movement of thought.

### History as Freedom

To gauge the prospects of success one should turn at once to the deepest roots of the movement. What Hegelian Marxist philosophy essentially offers, it was suggested, is a reading of history. It is not hard to discern the constitutive principle of Hegel's own reading, for he affirms it openly and often. World history is, he tells us, among many similar formulations, 'the progress of the consciousness of freedom'.<sup>6</sup> There is room for debate as to the relative importance of speculative thought and historical study in deriving and establishing this thesis. There can, however, be no doubt that Hegel regards it as fully in line with, and as yielding a realistic reading of, the empirical record. Thus, he makes regular appeals, in the course of filling it out, to our sense of what actually happened in history. In one version the appeal has the form of general taxonomy, comprising the oriental world in which one was free, the classical world in which some were

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in J. Ritter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*, trans. R.D. Winfield, Cambridge, Mass. 1982, p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> Though, of course, it is rendered variously as 'overcoming', 'transcendence' and 'sublation'.

<sup>6</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge 1975, p. 54.

free, and the modern world in which 'man' as such is free.<sup>7</sup> In another the appeal is to certain key episodes in the unfolding of the theme, from the destruction of the *polis* to the coming of Christianity and on to the Protestant Reformation of the Christian Church. The series culminates for Hegel in the French Revolution as the embodiment of the demand that freedom should be the organizing principle of political and social life. It is in his view the specific task of the modern world to work out the implications of this demand and realize them universally in practice.<sup>8</sup>

The revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe seem to slip almost too easily within this scheme. There is, for instance, a mass of evidence bearing on the point which concerns the views of the participants in the events themselves. The evidence is most dramatically illustrated by the crowds calling for 'Freedom' on the streets of Prague and Leipzig. It is surely not at all fanciful to see these people in a Hegelian perspective as having grasped the central truth of the modern world, that freedom belongs to their nature as human beings, and as having grasped also the contradiction between that nature and their actual conditions of life. The revolutions they made then appear as the outcome of the struggle to resolve this basic contradiction. Here one may invoke also the standard Western interpretation, held across virtually the entire political spectrum. According to this the East European revolutions were carried through for the sake of freedoms long familiar in the West.<sup>9</sup> These are various kinds of personal and civil freedom exercised through the ballot box and the market. As such they are aspects of what Hegel calls 'subjective' freedom, itself a constituent of the 'absolute' or 'substantial' freedom towards which history is making its patient progress.<sup>10</sup> He would be fully entitled to regard the latest developments as fitting his historical scheme, as stages in that dissemination of the legacy of the great French Revolution which is the definitive task of the age. To recognize this is not, of course, itself a formal confirmation of the scheme. Nevertheless, it provides at least the kind of assurance, the sense of being on the right lines, that comes from any large-scale conformity of empirical reality and the projections of theory.

There is no difficulty in associating Marx with this position, at least in general terms. At the most general level of all it is uncontroversially clear that he shares the vision of history as the history of human emancipation. It is for him a record of progress leading to 'that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom'.<sup>11</sup> At the level of the freedoms at stake in Eastern Europe there is a plausible line of thought which would keep him fully in step with Hegel. For there are sound textual grounds for supposing that Marx would no less have welcomed the achievement of 'bourgeois

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 54

<sup>8</sup> On this topic, see Bitter, *Hegel and the French Revolution*.

<sup>9</sup> A trenchant expression of this idea may be found in K. Sword, ed., *The Times Guide to Eastern Europe*, London 1990, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> For discussion of these terms and Hegel's views on freedom in general, see A.W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, Cambridge 1990, ch. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 3, London 1974, p. 820.

democratic' freedoms in those circumstances. It is at any rate plain that he did not by any means despise such freedoms, as some of the more unwise of his followers have done. Thus, he was an enthusiastic supporter of wider suffrage and, in practice, of the workers obtaining their full rights within the bourgeois order. Indeed, he was prepared to allow that by such means they might gain political supremacy in some countries.<sup>12</sup> Reminders of this kind can, however, be at best only isolated insights at the present stage of the argument. To fill them out we need a more detailed specification both of Marx's reading of the theme of freedom and of the significance of the recent events in Eastern Europe.

### A Moment of Liberation

The first requirement is to make the philosophy of history we are concerned with less abstract and schematic. For that one has to have some view of the dynamics of the patterns it deals in, of just what it is that drives the story forward. The natural direction in which to look is towards the idea of freedom itself. The question is how its claim to provide the constitutive principle of human history is to be understood and defended. Hegel's own thinking about freedom is often thought to involve various kinds of metaphysical excess. Marx fixed this tendency in his challenge to what he saw as the autonomous, transcendent status of spirit, the primary bearer of freedom in Hegel's account. Whether or not the challenge is justified, it is certain that Hegel's understanding of what freedom means starts from close to everyday conceptions of the matter. Freedom, he tells us, is 'self-sufficient being', and so 'If I am self-sufficient, I am also free.'<sup>13</sup> Thus, the basic idea of freedom is of a life which is at the subject's own disposal, determined by self and not by whatever is external to and other than self. Such a conception of freedom as self-determination is not only in keeping with everyday thinking but also captures the basis for the mainstream treatment of the topic by philosophers since the Greeks. These philosophers include Marx, as a mass of recent scholarship has confirmed.<sup>14</sup>

What spirit is initially confronted with as its other in Hegel's dialectic of freedom is nature. Hence, this dialectic is essentially the process by which nature, through the efficacy of human purpose and action, comes to be subordinated to spirit. With some conceptual and terminological revision the theme is fully taken up in Marx's thought. Thus, the 'true realm of freedom', referred to earlier, consists in 'socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control'.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Marx's view of the means by which this end is achieved builds on elements he found in Hegel. The process of emancipation is driven by the kind of interaction with, and transformation of, the

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, S. Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge 1968, pp. 202–20.

<sup>13</sup> Hegel, *Lectures*, p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> A useful summary of, and contribution to, this scholarship is R.G. Peffer, *Marxism, Morality and Social Justice*, Princeton 1990, ch. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Marx, *Capital* Volume 3, p. 820.

natural world that consists in working on it. Thus we arrive at the category of work, the distinctive foundational category of the Hegelian Marxist project. Work is, as Hegel explains in the *Science of Logic*, a purposive activity involving an end postulated by need, a material supplied by nature and the rational shaping of instruments to transform what is given in the service of the end.<sup>66</sup> A 'moment of liberation' is, he believes, 'intrinsic' to the process.<sup>67</sup> This is so for the individual who objectifies his or her powers in the world, thereby both developing the powers themselves and achieving self-awareness. Thus, in the master-slave dialectic it is the slave who 'through work... becomes conscious of what he truly is' while the master remains sunk in indolence and insensibility.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the labour of the slave is both the emblem of and the key to the development of the power and self-consciousness of the species; that is, of the distinctive human history of freedom. Hence it is that Marx is able to praise Hegel for grasping labour as 'the essence of man' and for comprehending 'objective man' as 'the outcome of man's own labour'.<sup>69</sup> The idea was to be taken up and given canonical status in the classic texts of the Hegelian Marxist tradition.<sup>70</sup> The core of that tradition is a philosophy of history grounded in the teleology of human labour.

### A Weak Impulse

This is still a highly abstract thesis, in immediate need of being interpreted in more concrete terms. Marx's own interpretation is, of course, usually known as the 'materialist conception of history'. The precise nature of this conception is much disputed, even as regards its most salient features. It should, however, be possible to take the argument forward without having to adjudicate here between the rival accounts. The best plan may be to develop it with reference to a particularly widely held and textually plausible version, but in a way that allows the results to be adapted for others. On any view the story chiefly concerns the forces and the relations of production. The one we shall use holds that the source of large-scale historical change lies in the nature of the forces, in their lust to expand.<sup>71</sup> It is this inner dynamism which, in revolutionary times, is responsible for the transformation of the relations of production, hence of social relations generally and, ultimately, of the entire 'superstructure' of society. The point to note is that this dynamism can be intelligible only if it is conceived as internally related to the purposive character of the labour process. The idea, roughly speaking, is that the intelligent shaping

<sup>66</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, London 1969, pp. 745-50.

<sup>67</sup> Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford 1952, p. 128.

<sup>68</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford 1977, p. 118.

<sup>69</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Moscow 1974, p. 131.

<sup>70</sup> See, in particular, Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. R. Livingstone, London 1971; Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, London 1967.

<sup>71</sup> Other versions attribute greater scope and initiative to the relations, or seek to weaken the force-relations contrast. See, for example, the essays in M. Cohen, T. Nagel and T. Scanlon, eds., *Marx, Justice and History*, Princeton 1980, Part 2. In all versions the internal link to the labour process remains a condition of intelligibility, the chief point of the present discussion.

of means to ends in that process brings inescapably with it the possibility of technical innovation. Such innovation tends of itself both to ease the burden of labour and to enhance the productive capacity of the labourers. Given an appropriate setting, itself perhaps comprising a complex and vulnerable set of circumstances, innovations that do arise may be assumed to have some further tendency to catch on in the community in question and become a permanent addition to its repertoire. In so doing they may be said to constitute an expansion of its productive power; that is, of the forces of production.

By steps such as these it becomes possible to envisage an in-dwelling, enduring tendency towards the development of the forces. This in turn may be seen as providing a shaping impulse, an element of essential directedness, in history. It will have to be conceived of as a weak impulse, constantly liable to be overborne or lie dormant for long stretches of historical time.<sup>22</sup> This will be particularly the case where relations of production are unfavourable to the growth of the forces. It may be that, for instance, the existing ruling class does not stand to benefit from their growth. Such conditions are quite routinely met in history. Indeed, their satisfaction may, as Marx suggests, be characteristic of all economic systems other than capitalism.<sup>23</sup> Only under capitalism does the immanent logic of the labour process become, as it were, directly harnessed to the vital principle of the mode of production itself, to its insatiable drive for profits and wealth accumulation. Moreover, it is only under capitalism that it becomes possible for thinkers such as Marx to grasp the historical dynamic of the weak impulse and thus for it to enter more generally the consciousness of the age. When this occurs it may be assumed to take on a more insistent beat, less subject to countervailing forces. Even when it is subdued or suppressed, however, it yields an intelligible, guiding thread for historical reflection. Between such an inner dialectic and the blank externality of the causal sequences that occupy positivist thought there is, it may be suggested, all the difference in the world.

Now that theoretical grounding for the materialist doctrine of forces and relations has been suggested, it may be asked whether the doctrine itself is capable of bearing any explanatory weight. The obvious way to test this is to seek, as Marx did, to apply it to key transitional episodes in history. It is difficult to think of one capable of bringing it to life more vividly than the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe. The standard view of those events, advanced by a wide range of commentators, locates the primary causal factor in the failure of the economic project in which existing regimes were engaged; that is, of matching or surpassing the capitalist West. These countries, together with the Soviet Union, did have significant achievements to their credit in the 'extensive' phase of development, that of heavy industry and of problems amenable to solution through quantitative increases

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<sup>22</sup> The term 'weak impulse' is taken from Erik Olin Wright, 'Giddens's Critique of Marxism', *NLS* 138, March–April 1983, p. 28. See this source for further discussion of the idea.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, trans. B. Fowkes, Harmondsworth 1976, p. 617.

in the factors of production. Where they began to falter, and eventually to fail altogether, was in the second, 'intensive' phase, that of high-technology production geared to satisfying consumer needs. This failure is reflected in a distorted but still revealing form in information on economic growth rates. By the second half of the nineteen-eighties, it is generally agreed, the rate of growth for most of the countries of Eastern Europe was effectively zero.<sup>24</sup> This situation placed great strain on political and social systems. It induced popular disaffection and unrest and, perhaps just as important, a loss of morale on the part of the ruling groups themselves. The outcome was a general crisis of legitimacy leading to revolution. Once again events seem to fit almost too neatly our theoretical framework. In particular, they exemplify the supposedly central case of the sweeping away of relations of production which have come to be obstacles to the dynamic of the forces. Old texts come to mind at this point:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production . . . From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution.<sup>25</sup>

These well-worn phrases now take on freshness and substance. They seem before our eyes to lose their formulaic, quasi-metaphorical character and become literal and lived truths. This readiness with which the 1989 events fit the basic materialist explanatory scheme is of considerable significance for the present discussion. It suffices of itself to ensure that reports of the death of Marxist theory, whether jubilant or despairing, are at least premature.

### The Standpoint of Totality

The discussion has so far managed with a thin specification of the meaning of events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This now needs to be made a little thicker, even if nothing like full justice can be done to the subject here. To begin with, one should draw out what is implied in the universally accepted description of the events as marking the death of Communism. The positive side of the coin is that they signify the restoration of capitalism in those countries and their reintegration into the international capitalist system. This description seems safe enough on general grounds, for there is no other complete mode of organization in sight within our present horizons. Moreover, the most powerful forces in the region, backed by relentless pressure from the West, are continually working to make reality conform ever more adequately to the description. This is not to imply that the process will take the same course in all the former territories of 'actually existing socialism', or that it will be plain sailing in any of them. Yet even though a comprehensive study would have to take account of significant differences between individual countries, we may reasonably abstract from them here, relying on our overall characterization. We can also accommodate within it the fact that, as a whole army of commentators have pointed out, the process

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the information in Sword, ed., *The Times Guide to Eastern Europe*, for individual countries.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Moscow 1970, p. 21.

is likely to be accompanied by considerable distress and dissatisfaction as the implications of market solutions begin to be felt, particularly by the working classes. These factors, however, seem likely to determine the speed and ease of the transition to capitalism, not its character as such. The situation is, of course, also complicated by the existence of national and ethnic tensions which are liable to be exploited by forces of the authoritarian and racist Right. But once more there is nothing here that lies off the capitalist agenda. The issue is rather the admittedly important one of just how that agenda is to be accomplished. In particular, there is the matter of whether the bourgeois freedoms for which the revolutions were fought are to be realized as an immediate outcome of them. More generally, there is the extent to which capitalism in the East will turn out to be accompanied by its supposedly standard, Western superstructure of liberal democracy. Thus the question is not whether the future is capitalist but rather what kind of capitalism is in store, whether it bears a human or a monstrous face.

Among the categories which offer prospects of getting a grip on this situation, that of 'totality' seems to have a special place. It is at any rate difficult to exaggerate the significance that has traditionally been attached to it within Hegelian Marxism.<sup>26</sup> The basic idea is of a structured whole whose movement is, as Hegel constantly insists, self-movement. Hence, its development is to be understood not in terms of the impact of external forces but in terms of the working out of internal oppositions, the self-contradictions of the system. In Marx's thinking about history the category finds concrete expression in the theme of the world market, a theme inextricably linked to that of world revolution. Thus, in the programme of work sketched in *Grundrisse* the culminating section was to be devoted to 'the world market and crises'. We are given a hint of the content envisaged for this section in a reference to the world market as the end-state 'in which production is posited as a totality together with all its moments but within which at the same time all contradictions come into play'. The implications for world revolution are drawn straight away:

The world market . . . forms the presupposition of the whole as well as its substratum. Crises are then the general intimation which points beyond the presupposition, and the urge which drives towards the adoption of a new historic form.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, it is the world market which constitutes the totality within which all the contradictions come into play, 'driving' towards the new world order of socialism.

### The Old Filthy Business

Marx was never to complete the *Grundrisse* programme. The resulting absence of any systematic treatment by him of the theme of 'the world

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<sup>26</sup> 'The whole system of Marxism stands and falls with the principle that revolution is the product of a point of view in which the category of totality is dominant.' Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. M. Nicolaus, Harmondsworth 1973, pp. 227-8.

market and crises' was to have unfortunate consequences for Marxist thought. Nevertheless, the sense of a totalizing perspective organized around that theme haunts his work throughout his career. For present purposes it may be most useful to note the way it informs his thinking whenever he addresses the possibility of a revolution that stays confined to some corner of the capitalist world. The discussion in *The German Ideology* of the material premisses of communism is particularly striking in this regard.<sup>28</sup> The basic premiss is declared to be the 'universal development of the productive forces'. With this development comes the world market which is itself a precondition of the existence of the revolutionary proletariat. For that class can 'only exist *world-historically*, just as communism . . . can only have a "world-historical" existence'. Without the full development of human productive powers a revolution would serve only to generalize want and, thereby, 'the struggle for necessities would begin again, and all the old filthy business would necessarily be restored'. All that would be possible is a communism existing merely 'as a local phenomenon' and destined to perish, for 'each extension of intercourse' between peoples 'would abolish local communism'. Marx summarizes the position as follows:

Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples 'all at once' and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with them.

This passage scarcely needs a gloss in order to bring out its relevance to the history of the Soviet Union. It offers in advance a judgement on that history that all the benefits of hindsight do not require us to alter in essentials. Its epitaph might be fashioned from the references here to a local communism mired in the struggle for necessities and doomed to extinction with the development of the productive forces and of 'the world intercourse bound up with them'.

This attitude towards the prospects for isolated revolutionary outbreaks is grounded in the very structure of Marx's thought.<sup>29</sup> It seems to have been universal, a feature of the intellectual climate, in early Marxism. Engels took for granted throughout his career the need for socialist revolution to be coextensive with the capitalist world as a whole. Similar assumptions were basic to the thought of such Marxists as Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky and Antonio Gramsci, and did much to condition their response to the Bolshevik seizure of power.<sup>30</sup> Even more striking is the way in which Marx's thinking was mirrored so faithfully by the makers of the Russian Revolution themselves. Over and over again, with unequalled force and clarity, and before and after October 1917, Lenin insisted that revolution in Russia could not succeed or sustain itself unless it led to revolution in

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<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Volume 5, London 1976, p. 49.

<sup>29</sup> There is a particularly vivid expression of it, set specifically in the context of the formation of the world market, in a letter to Engels of October 1858. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, London, n.d., pp. 133-5.

<sup>30</sup> Some light is shed on this in Robin Blackburn, 'Fin de Siècle: Socialism after the Crash', *MLA* 185, January-February 1991, pp. 5-66.



the West. So unequivocal are these warnings that Stalin in the thirties had some of them expunged from the published writings.<sup>31</sup> This was done in the fantastic cause of 'socialism in one country', a project so devoid of roots in either Marxist thought or empirical reality that even the pretence of the Soviet state's commitment to it had to be sustained through systematic violence and terror. The fundamental congruence of Trotsky's thinking with that of Lenin in this area scarcely needs labouring. It forms a large part of the substance of the theory of permanent revolution, itself the mainspring of his political thought. It seems reasonable to conclude that nothing in the recent history of the Soviet Union would have caught its founders intellectually unprepared. That history should be seen rather as belated testimony to their insight and prescience.

### Ripeness is All

The Russian Revolution has, it appears, to be recognized as a premature outbreak, an abortive attempt to force the pace of change, creating a historical interlude which is now drawing to a close. That the capitalist system should be able to absorb such a failure of socialism is itself no more surprising than its overwhelming, as noted by Marx, of the traditional economies of the East. Both testify to its progressive role, which he fully acknowledges, in developing world production and trade. It is part of the significance of recent events to demonstrate that this historic role is as yet by no means exhausted. Capitalism remains the uniquely dynamic form of organization, the only possible material basis for human emancipation under socialism. The events that demonstrate this are themselves wholly in accord with the logic of a system which insists that 'no social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed.'<sup>32</sup> On numerous occasions Marx reveals an awareness that such ripeness was not in fact the condition of the capitalism of his time.<sup>33</sup> At other times, it must be admitted, his realism is defeated by a species of wishful thinking, by too great an eagerness to discern in the present the lineaments of the new historic form. Yet such anticipations, misrecognitions, as it were, of the location of his own time in history, are surely understandable in someone who had devoted his life to the revolutionary transformation of the existing state of things. The events of our time, too, have left socialists with bitter truths to swallow. Even some with deep and principled misgivings about the Soviet system have become locked into a posture of anti-anti-Communism from which release is difficult. Moreover, all are alike subject to the current triumphalism of the Right, weary of jocular invitations to consider the longest route from capitalism to capitalism and similar conundrums. Yet students of dialectic, with the examples of Hegel and Marx in mind, should be able to keep their sense of humour. They will be aware that humour is itself a dialectical weapon, liable to the kind of reversal that strikes

<sup>31</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, *Marx Currents of Marxism*, Volume 3, Oxford 1978, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> Marx, *Contribution*, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> For evidence and discussion see I. Mészáros, 'Marx's "Social Revolution" and the Division of Labour', *Radical Philosophy* 44, Autumn 1986.

back at those who wish to exploit it. Hence, they will be alert to any signs of a transforming irony in the present situation.

There is, in the light of the preceding discussion, an obvious direction in which they should look. For events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union represent the resumption of a historical trend. This is the formation of the capitalist world market, a process of whose reality Marx was himself keenly aware but which has seemed to lapse for much of the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> Its resumption now is not so much an incremental addition as a crowning point or the closing of a circle. It is not with a mere quantitative extension of the scope of capitalism that we have to deal but with a qualitative shift or, to invoke another old dialectical figure, with a quantitative change which passes over into a qualitative one. What is happening is the inauguration of the virtually unrestricted rule of the world market for the first time in history.<sup>35</sup> With this capitalism becomes what it had never been before, a truly global system with no serious rivals in view. It has no longer to reckon with relations of contradiction between itself and other modes of social organization, a fact most vividly symbolized in the ending of the Cold War. All contradictions are now, as it were, displaced within, becoming forms of self-contradiction. To say this is to acknowledge the instantiation in reality of the framework of analysis postulated by Marx in his dealings with the world market. We are witnessing the creation of the totality within which alone all contradictions can come into play engendering systemic crises. Marx's social theory is directed to, and grounded in, the logic of a totality self-driven by its own internal tensions. This uniquely appropriate matrix and object of reference is now being constituted before our eyes. In such a perspective it is not with the death of Marxist theory that we have to deal but with the objective possibility of its regeneration.

### In the Spirit of Marx

There is a great deal of work to be done if this possibility is to be realized. The bulk of it belongs not to any kind of philosophical inquiry but to social science and in particular to political economy. What is needed above all is an inquiry that will achieve for contemporary capitalism what Marx achieved for that of the nineteenth century. The ground rules for such an inquiry as well as many points of entry into it may still be drawn directly from his work. The indispensable contribution is the general conception of capitalism as a system structured by contradictions which are insoluble in its own terms. The fundamental one, in Marx's view, is that between its inexorable promotion of the development of the forces and its own existence as an absolute barrier to that development. In more concrete terms the

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<sup>34</sup> See Giovanni Arrighi, 'Marxist Century, American Century: The Making and Remaking of the World Labour Movement', *NLR* 179, January–February 1990, pp. 29–63.

<sup>35</sup> The major exception appears, of course, to be China. The complex and ambiguous pattern of development in that country raises issues that cannot be dealt with here. The main point of the discussion may still perhaps be allowed to go forward on the grounds that the significance of the development is largely confined to China itself. Hence, it does not seriously challenge the idea that inter-systemic contradictions, oppositions of rival models of global organization, have for the present been stilled.

main structural weakness lies in its inability to ensure the continuous realization of surplus value on which its viability depends. The inability finds expression in crises of profitability, of investment and of economic activity in general. Marx's insights in this central area have not lost their power and relevance but they have now to be fleshed out and applied in new conditions. They have in particular to be projected in detail on to the global screen of the international market. In that context an obvious focus for analysis is the complex set of interactions between the so-called 'First' and 'Third' Worlds. The need for it is ever more pressing as the basic relationship of exploitation assumes the gross form of the transfer of resources from the poorest people on earth to the richest. It is, moreover, acquiring ever more obscene embellishments, especially of a military kind. There is, for instance, the supply of arms to barbaric dictatorships, periodically interrupted in order to visit the results of still more up-to-date technology on their subjects. In the background is the ever-present reality of mass hunger and disease in countries which have become fully locked in to the world system and are helpless in the face of its logic.

Any attempt to extend and apply Marx's mode of analysis in this situation will have problems of great difficulty to overcome. It may, however, tackle them with the crucial assurance that the object of study now for the first time satisfies a basic presupposition of the theory, that it constitute an autonomous whole whose determinants lie within. This in itself should serve to place some traditional issues in a more genial and rewarding perspective. The most important of them is the question of the identification of the revolutionary subject. As a form of dialectical thought Marx's social theory must conceive of itself as being in the closest touch with the movement of social reality. Given its specific character as revolutionary theory, this means that its fortunes are inextricably tied to the existence and effectivity of an agent through which the new historic form it envisages is to be achieved. It has been apparent for a long time that Marx's own candidate for the role, the proletariat of what were in his time the most advanced capitalist countries, is wholly misconceived. The historical movement known as 'Western Marxism' is from one point of view a response to the awareness of this truth. In broad terms the response took two forms, that of trying to supplement Marx's candidate with other centres of agency, and that of abandoning the dialectical problematic altogether by relaxing the requirement for theory to be objectified in such centres.<sup>36</sup> In either case the unsatisfactory, often incoherent, character of the results has been a cancer eating away at the vitality of Marxist thought in the West. It should now be clear that failure of this kind was only to be expected on theoretical grounds in the undeveloped state of the object of analysis. There can be no hope of identifying the grave-digger of capitalism while it has yet to reach maturity, with many potentialities and resources still untapped. The question was being posed in a context in which it was in principle unanswerable. This is not to say that with

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<sup>36</sup> Corresponding, roughly speaking, to the distinction among the archetypal 'Western Marxists' of the Frankfurt School between the positions of Marcuse and Adorno. See Joseph McCarney, *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism*, London 1990, chs. 2-3.

the emergence of the world system any easy answers will be available. It is merely that reality has moved to meet thought to the extent that a necessary condition for posing it fruitfully has fallen into place. It is a qualitative change from a historical situation in which even the best thinkers were condemned to beat their heads against a wall. Hence, it provides all the encouragement to tackle the question one can expect from general theory. For substantive progress one has to await the political economy of the world system that was referred to earlier.

The programme sketched above envisages, to put it crudely, both taking over a good deal from Marx's work and going beyond it in significant ways. At the very least it presupposes a willingness to address problems of which in the nature of the case he had little or no inkling, and to deal with them creatively by devising novel categories and hypotheses. A question that might arise at this point is whether or not the results could properly be characterized as 'Marxist'. It would be easy but unwise to dismiss it as merely a linguistic question in a trivial sense. For one thing, matters of terminology have themselves, for reasons that need not be elaborated here, a political importance. Moreover, some substantive lines of thought in the preceding discussion suggest that the terminology in question would definitely not be appropriate. Marx was, as everyone must be, a child of his time and the passage from his time to ours involves, it was argued, a qualitative leap. His is the science of immature capitalism and the problems of the mature form could at best be anticipated by him, with whatever depth of insight, not experienced as a living reality for theory to encompass. The specific nature of the theory in question is also significant. For, as we have seen, dialectical thought can least of all afford a sentimental cult of the founders. It is required, on pain of losing its identity, to move in expressive harmony with the movement of reality itself. Hence, it must be endlessly adaptive and dynamic and resist whatever would in any measure tend to tie it down, all forms of fixation and inertia. In particular, its relentlessly historical character makes it averse to giving the hostages to fortune implied in labelling by reference to the time-bound framework of an individual life, however remarkable. This is surely the inner truth of Marx's own notorious denial that he was a 'Marxist'. It may be well to follow his example in this respect. If it entails the disappearance from the intellectual scene of any substantial presence designated as 'Marxist' this would, one has to say, be just too bad. What matters is the existence there of a vigorous body of dialectical theory in the service of socialism. It will be more truly in the spirit of Marx if, whatever it is called, it incorporates as much of the substance of his thought as was suggested here than any amount of theorizing which piously retains the name while abandoning that substance.

### Lessons of History

It has been argued here that recent events testify to the vitality of the Hegelian Marxist philosophy of freedom and exhibit the explanatory power of the materialist conception of history. They also serve to put in place the framework of totality on which any theory that is socialist and dialectical depends. Some hints were given as to the lines along

which such a theory might be developed. The main responsibility for developing it does not, it was noted, belong to philosophy. Nevertheless, some questions of a philosophical kind do arise in connection with the project. The chief one may be stated as follows: What is the nature of the human community that realizes freedom? To this question Hegel and Marx give contrasting answers. The contrast is all the sharper against the background of their shared understanding of the significance of the question. They agree that freedom indispensably requires an appropriate social setting. It is the self-determination of essentially social beings, not of the isolated individuals of some forms of liberal thought. Beyond this it is impossible to hold the two of them even loosely together. For Hegel the community of freedom is the rational state, a political and juridical order whose members encounter one another primarily as citizens and bearers of rights. This order coexists with the familiar arrangements of civil society; that is, of market capitalism, curbing their excesses and reconciling their contradictions. For Marx the community of freedom is the *Aufhebung* of civil society and the capitalist state. It is a transformed social world in which people are related not as right-bearing citizen consumers but as 'freely associated producers'. The producers retain a public power and public authority for certain collective purposes. But these are emphatically not, as in Hegel, the uniquely appropriate focus of emancipated social life.

It is difficult not to suppose that recent world-historical events can shed some light on the rival merits of these views. To pursue the supposition is, admittedly, to engage more fully with the internal affairs of the dialectical tradition than we have done so far. The justification must be in part that the issue has already been the subject of much comment, usually to Hegel's advantage at the expense of Marx.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, if the attempt made here to commend that tradition has been successful such in-house concerns do have a proper claim on our attention. Anyone now disposed to take it seriously will naturally wish to know which version to follow in such an important area. In any case, some at least of the issues that arise have, as we shall see, a general significance, going beyond dialectics, for the political theory of freedom.

If one views the history of Communist regimes as constituting a kind of practical test of the ideas of Hegel and Marx, there are some other obvious conclusions to be drawn. Though they fall on both sides of the divide they perhaps need not, since they are relatively uncontroversial, detain us long. It is, to begin with, difficult to resist the verdict that Hegel has the better of things in one very important respect. This has to do with his basic insight that freedom has to be embodied as justice and, hence, as a constitutional system incorporating explicit and effective guarantees of rights. Any attempt to realize socialism without such an embodiment seems bound, in the light of the best judgement now available to us, to end in disaster. To suppose otherwise must seem, from our present standpoint in historical time, to

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<sup>57</sup> For a forceful expression of this view, see R. Sakwa, 'The Hegelian Triumph', *THES*, 12 July 1991.

be merely utopian, the very antithesis of dialectical thought. We can all the more afford to be brief here since the point has already been widely taken on the Left. Indeed, the idea of 'socialism with rights' is currently the focus of much intellectual effort there. The outcome of it must have great significance for the future of socialist theory.

There are, however, elements in Hegel's thought which are now more starkly revealed in a similarly unfavourable light. At the most general level they involve his view of the state and belief in its potential for the rational supervision of society. Doubts on this score are likely to concentrate on the role of the bureaucracy as the supposed 'universal class' which stands above all merely local and partial interests. The history of Communist regimes is surely the final nail in the coffin so far as the intellectual credibility of such ideas is concerned. The evidence from it decisively reinforces what we already know about the functioning of all actual bureaucracies. It avails little for the Hegelian to plead here the differences between the public service of the rational, constitutional state and that of the irrational tyrannies of Eastern Europe. This would have as much point in the present context as a claim by Marxists that in some non-actual world freedom outside any juridical order is possible for human beings. What we have to deal with is the practical bearing of events, the direction of the spin they impart, with whatever force, to the propositions of theory. From this perspective Hegel's state and its agents seem as abstractly utopian as Marx's structureless freedom. Both conceptions suffer from the defect that they work directly against the grain of our understanding of what is happening in contemporary history.

### Bodily Powers

The theme of Hegel contra Marx on the nature of the free society deserves to be taken a little further. This can be achieved by considering Hegel's position not through further confrontations with empirical reality but theoretically, in terms of his own favoured method of immanent critique. If one does so it emerges that capitalism cannot possibly form part of the solution to the problem as he conceives it. To show this, of course, by no means serves of itself to vindicate the socialist alternative. Nevertheless, it removes a significant obstacle on the way to that goal. Moreover, the manner of Hegel's failure is peculiarly suggestive in the context of the debate as a whole.

The fundamental problem is that Hegel's understanding of freedom cannot accommodate an institution which is central to, indeed partly definitive of, capitalist society, the institution of wage labour. The argument to this conclusion can only be presented schematically here in its bare essentials.<sup>38</sup> The first point to note is the distinctive twist Hegel gives to the primitive idea of freedom referred to earlier. This is

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<sup>38</sup> For a full discussion along the lines suggested here, see C.J. Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour. Marx and his Relation to Hegel*, Oxford 1986, ch. 8. Particularly valuable is Arthur's demolition of Hegel's attempt to distinguish, within the terms of his assumptions, between wage labour and slavery.

his insistence that for freedom to have any substance it must be translated 'into an external sphere', objectified in 'things' over which the individual's rights are acknowledged by others similarly placed.<sup>39</sup> Freedom requires the mutual recognition of private proprietors. The obvious expression of this vision in a form of society is, perhaps, the system of 'simple commodity production' with a market in goods though not in labour.<sup>40</sup> It is not, however, where Hegel wishes to arrive, and the route to his preferred destination involves a sustained forcing of the discussion from its natural bent. The first signs appear almost immediately when it becomes evident that the property condition is in principle satisfied by recognition of ownership rights in one's body and its powers, of one's legal status as a free labourer. Now the initially powerful rhetoric about the need for freedom to be realized in an external, objective sphere begins to sound hollow. It is, however, by no means the last place in the argument where the pressure of apologetics makes itself felt.

As a prelude to what follows it should be noted that Hegel is emphatically not, any more than is Marx, a philosopher for whom human beings are spirits only contingently lodged in bodies. On the contrary, the idea of our necessary embodiment is part of the very fabric of his thought.<sup>41</sup> It emerges forcefully in the section on Property in the *Philosophy of Right*. 'My body', he tells us, 'is the embodiment of my freedom', and so 'If another does violence to my body, he does violence to me.'<sup>42</sup> It follows that my rights in my body and its powers represent a peculiar sort of proprietorship. It is a matter of, in Hegel's own terminology, 'inner possessions', 'inward property'.<sup>43</sup> The question that now arises is how property so intimately related to the self can be alienated without giving rise to a form of self-alienation. That in turn would surely be incompatible with freedom which is in its root meaning for Hegel, as we have seen, precisely a remaining at home in unrestricted control of the self. The difficulty is increased by some other features of the situation of which he is well aware. The first is that the alienation of bodily powers normally occurs under compulsion. Those who engage in it have no other property to bring to the market and, hence, no other means to the satisfaction of their needs in civil society. A second feature is that the alienation in question is peculiar also in that the alienating subject cannot thereafter remain aloof from, and indifferent to, the use of what is alienated. On the contrary, the alienator of bodily powers has to be present throughout, exercising his or her personal capacities in subjection to the will of another. The self must be active in its own forced alienation—a paradigm case, one might suppose, of Hegelian unfreedom. It is hard to see a way out for Hegel here. The alienation of 'the embodiment of my freedom' can scarcely avoid being the negation of that freedom.

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<sup>39</sup> *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, pp. 40–41.

<sup>40</sup> It is this system that seems in fact to be presupposed by advocates of Hegel's economics, at least in their less guarded moments. See, for example, R.D. Winfield, 'Hegel's Challenge to the Modern Economy', in W. Maker, ed., *Hegel on Freedom and Economics*, New York 1987.

<sup>41</sup> See Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge 1975, ch. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, pp. 43–4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

The problem ultimately is that the ontological status he accords to what is alienated in wage labour renders it impossible for his philosophy of freedom to assimilate the practice. Wage labour is as such the surrender of an integral aspect of the self, a part of the substance of the personality, to external control, and so it must contravene the basic meaning of freedom as self-determination. At this point a strategic gap appears in his justificatory theory of capitalism, the economic system wholly dependent on the sale and purchase of labour power.

### An Inner Dialectic

The position is no more satisfactory when one turns from this level of theory to Hegel's understanding of how the system works in practice. He has a deep grasp of the economic logic of a society based on private ownership of the means of production. Given that logic, such a society will be a most unlikely setting for the emancipated existence which is the implicit teleology of history, a fact of which Hegel is at least partially, and uneasily, aware. The logic is that of capital accumulation, generating gross inequalities, 'a spectacle of extravagance and want'; more specifically, 'the creation of a rabble of paupers' and 'at the other end of the social scale, conditions which greatly facilitate the concentration of disproportionate wealth in a few hands'. In such circumstances, Hegel believes, 'poverty immediately takes the form of a wrong done to one class (*Klasse*) by another.'<sup>44</sup> As this language suggests, he is far from approving of such a state of affairs. Indeed, the institutional proposals of his political theory are designed to remove or mitigate its worst features. That is to say, they are intended to prevent the power of the owners of capital from controlling the whole of public life and to prevent the modes of thought that accompany and enable the accumulation process, the calculating spirit of prudent egoism, from pervading all social relationships. Hegel's remedies have, however, an archaic flavour. They rely on what are for the most part relics of feudalism—the system of estates, the corporations, the hereditary monarchy, the rooted, unchanging life of the agricultural class. Such clinging to the past sits oddly with his historical sense and with his awareness of the deeper forces at work in his own world. Feudal institutions must be unsuitable instruments for domesticating the dynamics of capitalist society, flimsy barriers against that tide of modernity of which Hegel was one of the first major interpreters.

His unease over his own solutions is closest to the surface in the central case of poverty. That poverty is central is due at least in part to his recognition that it is altogether incompatible with the enjoyment of freedom as a social being.<sup>45</sup> The special difficulty it presents stems from the fact that he grasps it as a structural feature of civil society, one that goes on being reproduced even in times of 'unimpeded activity' and industrial expansion.<sup>46</sup> The condition is, of course,

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123, 130, 277–8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149–50.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.



exacerbated in times of economic crisis. These are episodes which Hegel sees, in terms that anticipate Marx and Keynes, as arising from 'an excess of production', and, more precisely, from 'the lack of a proportionate number of consumers who are themselves also producers'. Some palliatives are considered and rejected before he gloomily concludes that civil society 'despite an excess of wealth' is unable out of its own resources 'to check excessive poverty'.<sup>47</sup> What he then goes on, rather strikingly, to envisage is that it will be driven by its 'inner dialectic' beyond its own limits to seek markets and colonies abroad as an outlet for surplus population and goods.<sup>48</sup> This, however, cannot possibly be a solution to the problem as Hegel perceives it. Imperialist expansion is not a recourse available to all individual civil societies, and has limits set by geography even for the most successful. Invoking it comes close in any case to an admission of failure since it is to accept that the Hegelian community is not an indefinitely self-sustaining whole in which all systemic contradictions have become *aufgehoben*. It is not, that is to say, the true, enduring home of human freedom.

It is, perhaps, in muted recognition of this fact that Hegel should treat the imperialist theme in so casual and perfunctory a way, a mere gesture which is never followed up and given substance in his work. His final comment on the matter is that 'the important question of how poverty is to be abolished is one of the most disturbing problems which agitate modern society.'<sup>49</sup> It is a problem which in those words he bequeaths to others to solve. This is itself, as various commentators have remarked, virtually a unique occurrence in his writings.<sup>50</sup> It is in the highest degree uncharacteristic that he, one of the most self-confident and relentlessly discursive of thinkers, should leave so important an issue hanging in the air, beyond the normally voracious grasp of the system. The explanation, as Marxists have repeatedly pointed out in such contexts, is that we here come up against the bourgeois horizons of his thought. What ultimately cramps and stultifies it is the fact that the true realm of freedom cannot be built on the foundations of the private accumulation of capital. This is, however, a truth which Hegel only partially and fitfully perceives and which he can never fully acknowledge, still less draw in to the centre of his theoretical framework.

It is undeniably instructive to see a great thinker reduced in this way to evasion, inconsequentiality and, ultimately, silence. No greater tribute to the power of capital in the intellectual sphere could be conceived. Yet if Hegel's solutions are spurious, the problems he had in view are genuine and enduring. Mass poverty remains a fact of life under advanced capitalism and particularly in countries such as the United States and Britain where the triumph of 'the principle of civil society' has been most complete. All that is remarkable there is the

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>50</sup> S. Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, Cambridge 1972, p. 154; A. Ryan, *Property and Political Theory*, Oxford 1984, p. 136.

practised smoothness with which apologists for the system manage to ignore its existence.

Meanwhile, the international scene with its division of 'First' and 'Third' Worlds presents a spectacle of extravagance and want on a scale Hegel could scarcely have imagined. Yet, once he had absorbed the shock, he would surely be able to recognize it as the appropriate outcome of the 'inner dialectic' he discerned in the society of his time. The argument of the present article has been that recent events in Europe have shifted this dialectic to a new and decisive phase. It is within the global order taking shape as a result of those events that it must run its course. It need not be feared that the tradition of thought Marx founded when he set Hegelian dialectic the right way up has been rendered obsolete or irrelevant by the working out of the historical process which has been its true object from the beginning. On the contrary, there is now everything to fight for so far as that tradition is concerned.

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## *World Income Inequalities and the Future of Socialism*

The thesis of this article is that the great political upheavals of our days—from Eastern Europe and the USSR to the Middle East—originate in a radical transformation of the social structure of the world-economy combined with a persistent, indeed deepening, income inequality among the regions and political jurisdictions into which the world-economy is divided.\* The radical transformation I am referring to began shortly after the end of the Second World War. It gained momentum in the 1960s, and tapered off in the late 1970s and 1980s. As succinctly put by Eric Hobsbawm, 'the period from 1950 to 1975...saw the most spectacular, rapid, far-reaching, profound, and worldwide social change in global history... [This] is the first period in which the peasantry became a minority, not merely in industrial developed countries, in several of which it had remained very strong, but even in Third World countries.'<sup>1</sup> The change in question has cut across the great West-East and North-South divides and has been primarily the result of purposive actions aimed at narrowing the gaps that circa 1950 separated

the wealth of the peoples situated on the privileged side of the two divides (the West/North) from the relative or absolute deprivation of the peoples situated on the underprivileged sides (the East and the South). The most important of these purposive actions was the pursuit of economic development by governments. By internalizing within their domains one or another of the features of the wealthier countries, such as industrialization and urbanization, governments hoped to capture the secret of their success and thus catch up with their wealth and power. Also important as a complement or as a substitute of governmental actions were actions undertaken by private organizations and individuals—most notably, the migration of labour, of capital and of entrepreneurial resources across state boundaries.

Individual successes notwithstanding, these actions failed in their attempt to promote a more equal distribution of wealth across the space of the capitalist world-economy. A handful of states did manage to shift some of the world's wealth their way, and many individuals achieved the same result by moving across state boundaries. But these achievements of a few states and of many individuals did not change the overall hierarchy of wealth. On the contrary, after more than thirty years of developmental efforts of all kinds, the gaps that separate the incomes of the East and of the South from those of the West/North are today wider than ever before.

In the 1980s, states in the East and in the South thus found themselves in a situation in which they had internalized elements of the social structure of wealthier countries through 'modernization', but had not succeeded in internalizing their wealth. As a consequence, their governments and ruling groups lacked the means of fulfilling the expectations and accommodating the demands of the social forces that they have brought into existence through modernization. And as these forces rebel a general crisis of developmentalist practices and ideologies begins to unfold. The crisis of Communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR is but one side of the coin of this general crisis of developmentalism. The other side of the coin is the crisis of the capitalist variant of developmentalism—a crisis which is most clearly visible in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East and North Africa but is apparent in one form or another throughout the South.

In what follows I shall focus on the increasing inequality of the global distribution of income, because in my view this is rapidly becoming the central issue of our times. I shall take for granted that processes of urbanization and industrialization have reached deep into the South and that numerous Third World countries have been industrializing

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, Comment in 'Reflecting on Labor in the West since Haymarket: A Roundtable Discussion', in J.B. Jenz and J.C. MacManus, eds., *The Newberry Papers in Family and Community History*, vol. 86, no. 2, 1986, p. 13.

rapidly. But I shall not assume, as most still do, that 'industrialization' and 'development' are one and the same thing.

The latter view is so ingrained that it has remained unchallenged notwithstanding the recent wave of deindustrialization among some of the wealthiest and most powerful states of the West. These states continue to be identified as 'industrial' or 'industrialized', while the corresponding rapid industrialization of comparatively poor states is taken at face value as the equivalent of 'development'. This view obscures the fact that industrialization has been pursued not as an end in itself but as a means in the pursuit of wealth. Whether or not industrialization has represented 'development' depends entirely on whether or not it has been an effective means in this pursuit. As we have shown elsewhere, the effectiveness of industrialization in delivering wealth in the world-economy at large has declined with its general spread until, on average, its returns have become negative.<sup>2</sup>

By focusing on the persistent and deepening inequalities in the distribution of income across the space of the capitalist world-economy, I simply want to underscore that—a few exceptions aside—the spread of industrialization has not delivered on its promises. There has been a lot of industrialization (and even more urbanization) with incalculable human and ecological costs for most of the people involved. But there has been little 'catching up' with the standard of wealth set by the West. Industrialization or, more generally, modernization has thus failed to deliver what it had promised, and this failure is at the root of the serious troubles currently faced by most states in the East and in the South. These serious troubles are neither local nor conjunctural. They are systemic and structural. They are troubles of the world-system to which the West/North belongs as much as the East and the South. Forecasts and projects concerning the future of socialism in the West/North that ignore the systemic origins and consequences of these troubles are at best irrelevant and at worst dangerously misleading.

## I The Changing Standard of Economic Success and Failure

What do we mean when we say that Communism has 'failed' in Eastern Europe and in the USSR, or that capitalism has 'succeeded' in Japan and elsewhere in East Asia? Of course, different people mean different things. Yet, in the back of our minds there looms a fairly universal standard against which we assess the performance of political and economic regimes around the world. This standard is the wealth of the West/North—not of any particular region or political jurisdiction into which the West/North is divided, but of the West/North as an ensemble of differentiated units engaged in mutual cooperation and competition.

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<sup>2</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, 'The Developmentalist Illusion: A Reconceptualization of the Semiperiphery', in W.G. Martin, ed., *Semiperipheral States in the World-Economy*, New York 1990, pp. 18–25; Giovanni Arrighi and Jessica Drangel, 'The Stratification of the World-Economy: An Exploration of the Semiperipheral Zone', *Review*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 53–7.

The fortunes of these constituent units relative to one another are subject to continuous ups and downs, which may matter a lot to the units most visibly affected by them, but appear as irrelevant—and rightly so—when it comes to assessing the performance of states and regions that do not belong, or did not belong until recently, to the West/North ensemble. Is it Sweden, or Germany, or France, or the UK, or the US, or Canada, or Australia that we refer to when we say that Communism has failed in Eastern Europe and capitalism has succeeded in Japan? Clearly, to all of them in general but to none of them in particular. What we are in fact referring to, knowingly or unknowingly, is some kind of average or composite standard of wealth that every region and political jurisdiction of the West/North has enjoyed to some degree for a long time, though not to the same degree all the time.

In order to make the assessment of success and failure in the contemporary world-economy less fuzzy than usual, I shall take as an indicator of this composite standard the GNP per capita of what I shall call the 'organic core' of the capitalist world-economy. For our present purposes I define the 'organic core' as consisting of all the states that over the last half-century or so have occupied the top positions of the global hierarchy of wealth and, in virtue of that position, have set (individually or collectively) the standards of wealth which all their governments have sought to maintain and all other governments have sought to attain.

These states belong to three distinct geographical regions. The most segmented of the three regions, culturally and jurisdictionally, is Western Europe—defined here to include the UK, the Scandinavian and the Benelux countries, former West Germany, Austria, Switzerland and France. The states lying on the western and southern outer rim of the region (that is, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece) have not been included in the organic core because for most or all of the last fifty years they have been 'poor relations' of the wealthier Western European states—poor relations which did not contribute to the establishment of a global standard of wealth but were themselves, through their governments, struggling more or less successfully to catch up with the levels enjoyed by their neighbours. The other two regions included in the organic core are less segmented culturally and jurisdictionally. One is North America (US and Canada) and the other—small in population but large in territory—consists of Australia and New Zealand.

Table I shows for select years of the last half-century the GNP per capita of each of these three regions as a percentage of the GNP per capita of the organic core—that is, of these same regions taken as a unit. In brackets, the table also shows the population of each region as a percentage of the total population of the organic core. The most noteworthy feature of the table is a sharp widening, followed by a steady narrowing, and an eventual closing, of the income gap between North America and Western Europe—the two regions in which most of the population of the West/North has been concentrated.

Table I.

Comparative economic performance in the 'West' (organic core)

	1938	1948	1960	1970	1980	1988
I. Western Europe	83.2 (57.0)	56.5 (51.2)	65.7 (48.9)	73.5 (47.7)	103.0 (45.7)	91.4 (44.1)
II. North America	121.6 (40.5)	149.3 (46.0)	137.0 (48.0)	127.4 (49.0)	98.6 (50.7)	109.7 (52.1)
III. Australia & New Zealand	134.4 (2.4)	84.6 (2.8)	67.4 (3.1)	76.3 (3.3)	81.7 (3.6)	67.0 (3.8)
Weighted Average (Total)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)

## Notes

1. The figures represent GNP per capita of each region divided by the GNP per capita of the three regions taken together times 100. In brackets, population of the region as a percentage of the total population of the three regions taken together.

2. Western Europe consists of the Benelux and Scandinavian countries, (West) Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and the United Kingdom. North America consists of the US and Canada.

Sources: The GNP per capita of the regions have been calculated from data provided in W.S. Woytinsky and E.S. Woytinsky, *World Population and Production: Trends and Outlook*, New York 1953, for 1938 and 1948, and from World Bank, *World Development Report*, Washington D.C. 1982 and 1990, and *World Tables*, vols 1 and 2, Washington D.C. 1984, for the other years.

This trajectory reflects well-known trends of the capitalist world-economy during the period under consideration. The initial widening gap reflects the 'great leap forward' experienced by the North American economy in the course of the Second World War and the immediate postwar years. Thanks to this great leap forward, North America jumped ahead of all the other regions of the world-economy—Western Europe included. A new and higher standard of wealth was thereby established, and a race to catch up with that standard began in earnest. In the pursuit of this objective and with considerable financial and institutional assistance from the new hegemonic power (the US), Western European states rapidly restructured their domestic economies to the image and in the likeness of the North American economy.

As shown by Table I, the pursuit has been highly successful. By 1970 the income gap that separated Western Europe from North America was back to where it was in 1938, and by 1980 it had disappeared. The table actually shows that in 1980 the per-capita income of Western Europe surpassed that of North America but fell behind it once again in the 1980s. These latest ups and downs in the relative fortunes of the Western European and North American regions are largely due to fluctuations in the value of the US dollar relative to Western

European currencies. Whether these fluctuations are just cyclical adjustments that mark the end of the process of catching-up of the previous thirty years, or are the harbingers of underlying structural changes that prepare a new major differentiation in the fortunes of the two regions, as happened between 1938 and 1948, is a question that falls beyond the scope of this article. For present purposes suffice it to say that over the last half-century income inequalities among the regions of the organic core have never been smaller than they were in the 1980s.

This conclusion holds even if we take into account the more erratic trajectory of the Australian region—demographically by far the least significant of the three. In 1938, this region was the wealthiest region of the organic core. Like Western Europe, it experienced a sharp worsening of its position relative to North America between 1938 and 1948 but, unlike Western Europe, it continued to lose ground between 1948 and 1960. After 1960 its relative position began to improve but, after 1980, it deteriorated again. Having started out as the wealthiest of the wealthiest regions, Australia and New Zealand end up in 1988 as the poorest of the three.

This erratic trajectory does not change the conclusion that over the last half-century income differentials among the regions of the organic core of the world-economy have never been lower than in the 1980s. Thus, the ratio of the highest to the lowest of the three regional GNPs per capita stood at 1.6 in 1938, 2.6 in 1948, 2.1 in 1960, 1.7 in 1970, 1.3 in 1980 and 1.6 in 1988. In sum, if we confine our attention to the wealthiest regions of the world-economy, some of the most fundamental claims of procapitalist ideologies seem to be borne out. Only once in fifty years has there been a major increase in income inequalities, and that increase—by spurring laggards to compete more effectively—has activated forces that over time have reduced the inequalities. Moreover, within this narrow and stable band of inequalities, there seems to have been considerable upward and downward mobility. The last can indeed become first and the first last.

## II Miracles and Mirages

Procapitalist doctrines further maintain that the small group of nations that sets the standards of wealth in the world-economy is an open 'club' that any nation can join by proving its worth through appropriate developmental efforts and policies. This belief has been buttressed by the existence of some conspicuous cases of upward mobility in the hierarchy of wealth of the world-economy—cases that have in fact been so few as to deserve the designation of 'economic miracles'. How many of these miracles have there been? How 'real' have they been? How do they compare with one another?

Table II provides us with an overview of the most important instances of actual or alleged 'economic miracles'. It shows—for the same years as Table I—the GNP per capita of the locations listed on the left-hand side of the table as a percentage of the GNP per capita of the organic core. In brackets, the table also shows the population of those same locations as a percentage of the total population of the organic core.



**Table II.**  
**Comparative 'economic miracles'**

		1938	1948	1960	1970	1980	1988
I.	East Asia						
I.1	Japan	20.7 (20.3)	14.5 (23.1)	23.2 (22.8)	52.1 (22.6)	76.3 (23.5)	117.9 (23.4)
I.2	S. Korea	n.a.	n.a.	7.7 (6.0)	7.2 (7.0)	12.7 (7.7)	20.2 (8.0)
II.	Southern Europe						
II.1	Italy	32.0 (12.6)	22.8 (13.2)	37.0 (12.1)	50.4 (11.6)	60.9 (11.3)	74.8 (11.0)
II.2	Spain	41.6 (4.8)	18.4 (8.0)	18.6 (7.4)	28.9 (7.3)	48.0 (7.5)	43.4 (7.5)
III.	Latin America						
III.1	Brazil	12.0 (11.4)	11.3 (14.1)	12.1 (17.6)	12.7 (20.7)	17.5 (23.8)	12.1 (27.6)

Note:

The figures represent GNP per capita of state divided by the GNP per capita of the organic core (see Table I) times 100. In brackets, population of state as a percentage of the total population of the organic core.

Source: As Table I.

To avoid misunderstandings let us state at the outset that we do not take relative per-capita income—as measured by the ratio of the GNPs per capita—to be a valid and reliable indicator of the welfare of the inhabitants of the region or jurisdiction to which the ratio refers relative to that of the inhabitants of the organic core. Thus, when we say that the GNP per capita of Brazil has been for most of the last half-century about one-eighth (12 per cent or so) of the GNP per capita of the organic core—as shown in Table II—we are not saying that the welfare of the inhabitants of Brazil has been eight times less than that of the inhabitants of the organic core. It might have been more or less than that, depending on a whole series of circumstances—such as differences in the distribution of incomes or in the human and social costs involved in producing a given income—about which our indicator says nothing. Nor do we take the ratios of GNPs per capita to be valid and reliable indicators of the average productiveness of the inhabitants of the region or jurisdiction to which the ratio refers relative to the average productiveness of the inhabitants of the organic core. Also from this standpoint, whether or not the average productiveness of the inhabitants of Brazil has actually remained constant at one-eighth of the average productiveness of the inhabitants of the core depends on circumstances—such as differences/changes in terms of trade, exchange rates, claims on the incomes of the inhabitants of other states, transfer payments to/from the region or jurisdiction, and so forth—about which our indicator says nothing.

What the ratio of GNPs per capita is an indicator of—and a better indicator than anything else that is readily available—is the command of the inhabitants of the region or jurisdiction to which it refers over the human and natural resources of the organic core, relative to the command of the inhabitants of the organic core over the human and natural resources of that region or jurisdiction. Thus, our indicator tells us that the average command of the inhabitants of Brazil over the human and natural resources of the organic core is, and has been for most of the last fifty years, about eight times less than the average command of the inhabitants of the organic core over the human and natural resources of Brazil.

This relationship of unequal economic command between two locations of the world-economy should not be confused with Emmanuel's notion of 'unequal exchange'.<sup>3</sup> At least in principle, a relationship of unequal economic command may exist and persist between two locations in the absence of any relationship of unequal exchange in Emmanuel's sense; and, what's more, unequal exchange may become a factor undermining relationships of unequal economic command.<sup>4</sup> But whatever the relationship between the two kinds of inequalities might actually be at a particular time and in particular places, the relative economic command measured by our indicator is an expression not of unequal exchange as such, but of the totality of power relations (political, economic and cultural) that has been privileging the inhabitants of the organic core in their direct and indirect deals with the inhabitants of the regions and jurisdictions that lay outside the organic core.

Turning now to the data of Table II, the list is topped by the miracle of miracles: Japan. Our indicator provides a quite vivid image of the Japanese exploit. It shows both the extraordinary economic distance 'travelled' by Japan, and the extraordinary speed with which that distance has been travelled. With a GNP per capita slightly over one-fifth (20.7 per cent) of the GNP per capita of the organic core, Japan in 1938 was firmly saddled in the middle-income ('semiperipheral') group of states. In 1988, in contrast, the GNP per capita of Japan was almost 20 per cent higher than the average GNP per capita of the organic core. This ascent is all the more impressive in that, between 1938 and 1948, Japan's GNP per capita fell from 20.7 per cent to 14.5 per cent of the GNP per capita of the organic core. Thus, in just forty years Japan has caught up with and surpassed the standard of wealth of regions whose GNP per capita was almost seven times higher than its own.

The next country on the list is South Korea—demographically the largest of the so-called 'Four Tigers'. The other three 'Tigers' are not listed, either because of a lack of comparable data (as in the case of Taiwan, for which none of our sources give any data) or because they are city-states (Hong Kong and Singapore) whose economic performance must be assessed in conjunction with that of the regional economies of which they are an inseparable component.

<sup>3</sup> Arghiri Emmanuel, *Unequal Exchange*, New York 1972.

<sup>4</sup> See Arrighi, 'The Developmentalist Illusion', pp. 11–14.

South Korea is often said to be on its way to replicating the exploit of Japan. This might well be so, but the data of Table II suggest caution. South Korea, unlike Japan, began gaining ground relative to the standard of wealth of the organic core only in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, its ascent started from a much lower level of per-capita income than Japan. As a result, South Korea's position relative to the organic core in 1988 was almost exactly what Japan's position had been fifty years earlier in 1938. It follows that—however impressive from other points of view—South Korea's economic ascent still has a long way to go before it can be said to have replicated Japan's exploit. It is possible that, if we had comparable data, Taiwan would appear to have done just as well as or even better than South Korea. In any event, we should bear in mind that the South Korean economic miracle (and even more the Taiwanese) has uplifted a much smaller demographic mass than did the Japanese.

The second group of economic miracles listed in Table II concerns the two largest countries of Southern Europe, Italy and Spain. In the 1980s, Italy was sometimes referred to as the 'Japan of Europe', and Spain was often taken by Eastern Europeans (particularly in Poland) as a model of what their countries could have achieved had they not been under Communist rule. A comparison of the Italian and Japanese indicators does indeed reveal an important analogy between their trajectories: they both decrease sharply between 1938 and 1948, and then increase steadily up through the 1980s. The main difference—apart from the greater demographic weight of Japan—is that the Italian trajectory is flatter than the Japanese: it starts at a higher level (32 as against 20.7) and ends at a lower level (74.8 as against 117.9). Italy thus never caught up with (let alone surpassed, as Japan did) the standard of wealth of the organic core. Yet, by 1988 Italy had become wealthier than the poorer region of the organic core (Australia and New Zealand), and its GNP per capita was only 25 per cent lower than that of the organic core as a whole.

The Spanish trajectory is even 'flatter' than the Italian. It drops very markedly between 1938 and 1948, rises between 1960 and 1980, and decreases slightly in the 1980s. As a result of these fluctuations, the GNP per capita of Spain as a percentage of the GNP per capita of the organic core was in 1988 roughly the same as in 1938 (43.4 per cent as against 41.6 per cent). From this point of view, the Spanish miracle—such as it was—resembles not so much the Japanese miracle as the Brazilian 'miracle', which attracted a lot of attention in the late 1970s only to be perceived more as a mirage in the 1980s.

The most striking feature of the Brazilian trajectory as revealed by our indicator is its absolute and almost uninterrupted flatness. From 1938 to 1970 Brazil's GNP per capita remained stuck at about 12 per cent of the GNP per capita of the organic core. Between 1970 and 1980 it went up to 17.5 per cent, but by 1988 it had gone back to its usual 12 per cent. It was this temporary upward jump that in the late 1970s led many to announce that a new economic miracle was in the making and that Brazil was on its way to catching up with core standards of wealth.

As it turned out, the upward jump was nothing but a blip on an otherwise absolutely flat curve. Yet, we should not be too hasty in declaring the Brazilian miracle just a mirage. In comparison with miracles Japanese-style—or even Italian- and Korean-style—the Brazilian and Spanish trajectories may seem to depict a minor failure rather than a major success story. But this assessment is based on a highly distorted view of what has been a normal achievement in the capitalist world-economy of the last fifty years. Before we pass a final judgement on the apparently unimpressive performance of Brazil and Spain, let us therefore widen the horizon of our observations to encompass those regions that account for an ever-growing majority of the world population.

### III The Widening Income Gap between Rich and Poor

The overall picture that emerges from Table III (compiled in the same way as Table II) is one of a major widening of the already large income gap that fifty years ago separated the peoples of the South from the peoples of the organic core of the capitalist world-economy. To be sure, the gap has widened very unevenly in space and time, as we shall see presently. Yet, the overall long-term tendency is unmistakable: the vast majority of the world's populations have fallen increasingly behind the standards of wealth set by the West.

This general worsening in economic standing has not affected equally all the regions and smaller aggregates listed in Table III. Limiting our consideration to the regions and aggregates for which we have data both for 1938 and 1988, the worsening has been least for Latin America (regardless of whether we include or exclude Brazil) and greatest for South Asia, followed closely by Southern and Central Africa. More specifically, between 1938 and 1988 the income gaps between the units listed in Table III and the organic core—as measured by the ratio of the GNP per capita of the organic core to the GNP per capita of each unit—have increased by a factor of 1.8 in the case of Latin America (of 2.4 if we exclude Brazil), by a factor of 2.6 in the case of Southeast Asia (as measured by the Indonesia and Philippines aggregate), by a factor of 2.7 in the case of the Middle East and North Africa (as measured by the Turkey and Egypt aggregate), by a factor of 4.1 in the case of Southern and Central Africa, and by a factor of 4.6 in the case of South Asia.

This unevenness in the extent to which the relative economic position of poor regions has worsened over the last fifty years has led to a further widening rather than to a narrowing of income differentials among the poor regions themselves. Thus, the ratio of the highest to the lowest GNP per capita of the five units under consideration stood at 4.2 in 1938, 4.6 in 1960, 5.5 in 1970, 9.9 in 1980 and 5.9 in 1988. (We do not know what the ratio for 1948 was because no data are available for the Southeast Asian aggregate, which at the time presumably still had the lowest per-capita income of all five units. However, it is plausible to assume that between 1938 and 1948 the Southeast Asian index did not fall sufficiently [27 per cent or more] to raise the ratio in question above its 1938 value.)

Table III.

## Comparative economic performance in the 'South'

	1938	1948	1960	1970	1980	1988
I. Latin America	19.5 (31.1)	14.4 (38.3)	16.7 (45.7)	15.5 (53.7)	19.8 (63.8)	10.6 (72.9)
I.1 Excl. Brazil	23.8 (19.7)	16.2 (24.2)	19.6 (28.1)	17.3 (33.0)	21.1 (40.0)	9.7 (45.3)
II. Middle East and North Africa	n.a.	n.a.	11.5 (19.6)	8.1 (22.5)	11.1 (27.5)	7.1 (32.0)
II.1 'Turkey and Egypt'	14.9 (9.8)	13.0 (10.9)	12.8 (12.9)	7.7 (14.8)	8.1 (17.5)	5.6 (19.9)
III Sub-Saharan Africa						
III.1 Western and Eastern	n.a.	n.a.	3.6 (36.8)	3.4 (42.3)	4.7 (51.7)	1.6 (65.1)
III.2 Southern and Central	25.2 (6.9)	18.3 (7.6)	10.5 (10.1)	11.3 (11.4)	n.a.	6.1 (16.1)
IV. South Asia	8.2 (109.6)	7.5 (123.3)	3.6 (131.6)	2.8 (149.1)	2.0 (173.4)	1.8 (200.3)
V. Southeast Asia	n.a.	n.a.	6.6 (38.4)	3.8 (43.8)	5.7 (52.0)	3.7 (58.9)
V.1 'Indonesia and Philippines'	6.0 (24.1)	n.a.	6.4 (29.5)	2.8 (33.1)	4.6 (39.2)	2.3 (44.8)

## Notes:

1. The figures represent GNP per capita of region or aggregate divided by the GNP per capita of the organic core times 100. In brackets, population of region (or aggregate) as a percentage of the population of the organic core.

2. Aggregate I consists of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela. Aggregate II consists of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Syria and Turkey. Aggregate III.1 consists of Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, Tanzania, Upper Volta. Aggregate III.2 consists of South Africa, Zaire, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Aggregate IV consists of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Aggregate V consists of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Singapore.

Source: As Tables I and II.

In sum, over the last fifty years income inequalities among the poorer regions of the world-economy have followed a pattern that in key respects is the exact opposite of the pattern followed by income inequalities among the wealthy regions (see section I, above). Between 1938 and 1948, when income inequalities among the wealthy regions increased sharply, those among the poorer regions probably remained the same or decreased. Between 1948 and 1980, when income inequalities among the wealthy regions decreased steadily, those among the poorer regions increased steadily. And between 1980 and 1988, when income inequalities among the wealthy regions increased, those among the poorer regions decreased sharply. As a result of these opposite movements, the trend in income inequalities over the last

fifty years has been towards a decline among the wealthy regions, but towards a rise among the poorer regions.

The increasing income gap between rich and poor has developed extremely unevenly not just in space but also in time. Most of the losses of the South relative to the West have been concentrated in the first and last decades of the fifty-year period under consideration. Only one region (South Asia) has experienced a steady, uninterrupted deterioration of its economic position relative to the organic core over the last fifty years. At one time or another all the other regions have experienced a reversal of the tendency: Latin America in 1948–60 and again in 1970–80, Southern and Central Africa in 1960–70, and all the other regions (except South Asia) in 1970–80. But no region improved its position relative to the organic core between 1938–48 or between 1980–88. During these two periods all the regions listed in Table III lost ground relative to the standard of wealth set by the organic core and, on average, the losses were much heavier in these two periods than at any other time.

The losses of the period 1938–48 are for the most part a reflection of the great leap forward of the North American economy during this decade (see section I above). This great leap forward made all the other regions of the world-economy—including traditionally wealthy regions such as Western Europe—look and feel poorer in 1948 than they did in 1938. To be sure, the destructions and disruptions of the Second World War had made many regions and countries poorer not just in relative but in absolute terms as well. But neither in absolute nor in relative terms did the regions of the South do any worse than core regions other than North America or than the sites of subsequent economic miracles. As a matter of fact, comparatively speaking they did well. Thus, all the indicators of Table III fell between 1938 and 1948—the Latin American by 27 per cent (by 32 per cent if we exclude Brazil), the Southern and Central African by 26 per cent, the Middle Eastern and North African by 13 per cent, and the South Asian by 8 per cent. But these contractions are either of the same order as, or significantly smaller than, the contractions in the indicators of Western Europe (32 per cent), Australia and New Zealand (37 per cent), Japan (30 per cent), Italy (29 per cent) and Spain (56 per cent) (calculated from Tables I and II).

By establishing a new and higher standard of wealth in the world-economy, the great leap forward of the North American economy set the stage for the developmental efforts of the subsequent thirty years. As a matter of fact, the new hegemonic power itself (the US) proclaimed that under its leadership old and new nations alike could attain that standard, provided of course that they followed as best as they could the American way to economic prosperity. As later codified in W.W. Rostow's 'Non-Communist Manifesto', this doctrine conceived of nations as passing through an essentially similar series of stages of political and economic development—stages that led from tradition-bound poverty to high-mass-consumption prosperity. Most nations were still caught up in one or another of the early stages. But adherence to the principles of free enterprise assured that

eventually each and every nation would reach the stage of high mass-consumption.<sup>3</sup>

One variant or another of this doctrine provided the ideological cement that gave cohesion to the US world order until the doctrine was tacitly abandoned in the 1980s. For about thirty years Third World nations were continually spurred into sustained developmental efforts aimed at catching up with the standards of high mass-consumption enjoyed by the people of North America and, increasingly, of the entire West, which came to include Japan as honorary member. There were several partial and temporary successes, as witnessed by the numerous increases in the indicators of Table III noted above. But precisely at the moment when all the indicators seemed to be headed upward—as they were circa 1980 with the only exception of South Asia—they all collapsed without exception in the course of the next decade.

The collapse of the 1980s differs from the contraction of the 1940s quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively it has been much sharper. Between 1980 and 1988, the indicator for Latin America (including Brazil) fell by 46 per cent (54 per cent if we exclude Brazil), the indicator for the Middle East and North Africa fell by 27 per cent (31 per cent for the smaller 'Turkey and Egypt' aggregate), the indicator for Western and Eastern Africa fell by 66 per cent, the indicator for South Asia fell by 10 per cent and that for Southeast Asia by 35 per cent (50 per cent for the smaller 'Indonesia and Philippines' aggregate). Notwithstanding the fact that these contractions refer to an eight-year period instead of a ten-year period, they are all higher—most of them much higher—than the corresponding contractions of the period 1938–48 listed earlier (see p. 50 above).

But the main difference between the two contractions is qualitative rather than quantitative. As we have seen, the earlier contraction was largely a reflection of the great leap forward of the North American economy and marked the beginning of sustained developmental efforts aimed at catching up with North American standards of high mass-consumption. The contraction of the 1980s, in contrast, has been a reflection of the general collapse of these efforts and marks their abandonment in the face of mounting challenges from above and below.

The main challenge from above has come from a turnabout in the policies and ideology of the world-hegemonic power. Circa 1980 the US abandoned the doctrine of development for all in favour of the doctrine that poor countries should concentrate their efforts on economizing as much as they could as a means to the end of enhancing their capabilities to service debts and to preserve their creditworthiness. Solvency rather than development has become the password. At the same time, US governmental agencies and enterprises

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<sup>3</sup> See W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth. A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge 1960.

stepped up their own indebtedness—nationally and internationally—and began competing aggressively with poorer states in world financial markets.

This turnabout has probably been the most important single factor in the sudden collapse of Third World incomes in the early 1980s. But it has not been the only factor. Developmental efforts have been challenged as much from below as from above. Challenges from below were extremely diversified depending on local circumstances. Widespread and persistent labour unrest, the proliferation of grassroot organizations of mutual aid, poor-people's religious movements (such as the Shi'ite revival in Islam or liberation theology in Latin America), human-rights and democracy movements, may seem to have little in common with one another. Yet, over the last decade or so they have been variants of the resistance of Third World peoples against developmentalist ideologies and practices that imposed exorbitant social and human costs on subordinate groups and classes without delivering much or anything of what they promised.

Caught between challenges from above and challenges from below, an increasing number of Third World governments have been forced or induced to give up their developmental efforts and to settle—more or less grudgingly—for a subordinate position in the global hierarchy of wealth. Today, very few of those in office in the South—or for that matter in the North—still believe in the fairy tale of Rostow's 'Non-Communist Manifesto'. Most of them know—even when they do not say so—that the nations of the world are not all walking along the same road to high mass-consumption. Rather, they are differentially situated in a rigid hierarchy of wealth in which the occasional ascent of a nation or two leaves all the others more firmly entrenched than ever where they were before.

The legitimation of this harsh reality in the minds and hearts of the peoples condemned to dwell on the lower rungs of the global hierarchy of wealth—peoples who make up the vast majority of the human race—is and will remain problematic. For the moment, however, the legitimation of the unprecedented world income inequalities that have emerged in the 1980s has been eased by a general perception of the crisis of developmentalism as being symptomatic of the failure, not of historical capitalism as world-system, but of its opponents—first and foremost of Communism and, by reflection, of socialism. Let us briefly look at the nature and origins of this perception.

#### IV The Failure of Communism in World-Historical Perspective

Communism as a mode of rule has failed in many respects. By general admission, however, its greatest failure has been economic—the failure, that is, to create within its domains an abundance of means comparable to that existing in the West. The scantiness of comparable data makes it difficult to assess accurately the historic dimensions of this failure. Nevertheless, our sources do provide sufficient comparable data to enable us to make some plausible guesstimates.



These comparable data have been used to compute the indicators of Table IV, which has been calculated in the same way as the indicators of Tables II and III. Scanty as they are, the indicators of Table IV give us some idea of the historic proportions of what is commonly understood by the failure of Communism. Far from catching up with the standards of wealth of the West, the East has fallen increasingly behind those standards. Between 1938 and 1988 the income gap between the organic core and the three units for which we have comparable data at the appropriate points in time has increased by a factor of 2.3 in the case of China, by a factor of 2.4 in the case of the aggregate 'Hungary and Poland', and by a factor of 2.9 in the case of Yugoslavia. Since in all three instances the Communist regimes were established circa 1948, their performance should in fact be assessed from that year rather than from 1938. Unfortunately the only comparable data we have for 1948 concern 'Hungary and Poland'. Judging from this single case the performance has been somewhat better in the forty years of Communist rule than in the longer period—its relative economic position having worsened by a factor of 1.7 over four decades instead of 2.4 over five decades. However, the performance is not so much better as to prevent us from concluding that Communist regimes have failed, not just to catch up with Western standards of wealth, but also to maintain their distance below those standards.

Table IV.

Comparative economic performance in the 'East'

	1938	1948	1960	1970	1980	1988
I. USSR	25.2 (48.9)	18.3 (55.6)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
II. Eastern Europe						
II.1 'Hungary and Poland'	26.7 (12.7)	18.4 (9.5)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	11.1 (9.3)
II.2 Yugoslavia	41.1 (4.4)	n.a.	28.4 (4.4)	18.0 (4.4)	22.5 (4.5)	14.1 (4.5)
III. China	4.1 (129.4)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2.5 (196.9)	1.8 (208.0)

Source: The indicators are calculated in the same way and from the same sources as the indicators of Tables II and III.

Needless to say, the failure assumes catastrophic proportions if we compare the economic performance of the domains of Communist rule with the most conspicuous cases of upward mobility within the capitalist world. Thus, in 1938 Japan's GNP per capita was about one-half that of Yugoslavia, about four-fifths that of 'Hungary and Poland', and about five times that of China. In 1988, in contrast, it was more than eight times that of Yugoslavia, more than ten times

that of 'Hungary and Poland', and more than sixty-five times that of China. Moreover, in so far as we can judge from the 'Hungary and Poland' indicator, in this comparison—or for that matter in an analogous comparison with Italy or Spain—the relative losses of the last fifty years have been concentrated in the forty years of Communist rule (1948–88). Thus, between 1938 and 1948 the GNP per capita of 'Hungary and Poland' lost almost nothing relative to that of Japan or Italy and actually gained relative to that of Spain. In the next forty years, in contrast, it declined by a factor of 13.4 relative to the Japanese GNP per capita, by a factor of 5.6 relative to the Italian and by a factor of 3.9 relative to the Spanish.

The comparisons made so far lead to the inescapable conclusion that Communist regimes have failed utterly in fulfilling their expectations and promises to be in a position to outcompete the capitalist West in the creation of abundance. Since we have no reason for believing that the USSR and its other Eastern European satellites, for which comparable data are missing, did much better than 'Hungary and Poland' or Yugoslavia, we can extend this conclusion to the Soviet 'empire' as a whole. Granted this, it does *not* follow, as many think, that the East as a whole—as opposed to some of its components—would have done any better economically than it actually did had it not been under Communist rule.

Even though many of the peoples of Eastern Europe and the USSR feel that Communist rule prevented them from matching at least the Spanish performance, this feeling has neither a factual nor a logical foundation. Factually, it disregards what the norm—as opposed to the exception—has been under capitalist rule. And logically, it is based on the false premiss that the standard of wealth set by the West could have been generalized to a much larger proportion of world population than it has been. Let us deal with the lack of factual foundations first.

As argued in the previous section, the few cases of 'upward mobility' in the hierarchy of wealth of the capitalist world-economy of the last half-century are quite exceptional and well deserve the designation of economic miracles. The rule for low- and middle-income states and regions has been neither to catch up with the standards of wealth set by the West (as Japan and Italy did) nor even to maintain their distance below these standards (as Brazil and Spain did). Rather, the rule has been (i) for the distance between wealthy and poor regions and states to widen and (ii) for wealthy regions and states to remain wealthy and for poor regions and states to remain poor with practically no turnover between the two.

This rule has applied to the domains of Communist rule as much as it has to all other domains. A comparison of the indicators of Tables III and IV immediately reveal that the economic performance of the domains of Communist rule has been neither better nor worse than that of the regions that back in 1938 or 1948 occupied a similar position in the global hierarchy of wealth. In so far as Eastern Europe and the USSR are concerned, these regions were Latin America

(including or excluding Brazil), Southern and Central Africa—a region which by a curious statistical accident had exactly the same GNP per capita as the USSR both in 1938 and 1948—and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East and North Africa as measured by the 'Turkey and Egypt' aggregate. As for China, the relevant comparisons are with South Asia and with Southeast Asia as measured by the 'Indonesia and Philippines' aggregate.

In the first set of comparisons, between 1938 and 1988 Yugoslavia did worse than Latin America (regardless of whether we include or exclude Brazil), more or less the same as 'Turkey and Egypt' and much better than Southern and Central Africa; and between 1948 and 1988 'Hungary and Poland' did much better than both Southern and Central Africa and 'Turkey and Egypt', only slightly worse than Latin America including Brazil, and exactly the same as Latin America excluding Brazil. The long-term stability of the ratio of the GNP per capita of 'Hungary and Poland' to that of Latin America excluding Brazil is particularly striking: it was 1.12 in 1938, 1.14 in 1948 and 1.14 again in 1988.

In so far as these indicators are any guide at all to the overall performance of Eastern Europe and the USSR as a whole, we can conclude that the economic failure of Communist regimes in this region has been a failure only relative to the promise and expectation that a centrally planned developmental effort and an effort at 'delinking' from the global circuits of capital could create within the domains of Communist rule an abundance of means comparable to or even greater than that existing in the capitalist West. But it is not a failure relative to what other middle-income regions that did not resort to central planning and did not delink from the global circuits of capital have achieved over the same period of time. Central planning or no central planning, delinking or no delinking, middle-income regions have tended to remain middle-income regions, losing ground relative to high-income regions and gaining ground relative to low-income regions.

This does not mean, of course, that one or more of the political jurisdictions in which Eastern Europe has been divided—and in which the USSR itself might have been divided had it broken up during the Second World War—could not have been blessed by some kind of economic miracle of the Spanish or Brazilian variety (perhaps, even of the Japanese or Italian variety) had they not been delinked during the last forty years. But in so far as the bulk of the population of the region is concerned, I cannot see any valid reason why the present and former domains of Communist rule in Eastern Europe and the USSR would have done any better, let us say, than Latin America if they had not been centrally planned and delinked. As a matter of fact, I can think of very good reasons why they probably would not have. Before we discuss what these reasons are, let us briefly compare the performance of China with that of South Asia and Southeast Asia.

For what the data are worth, this comparison establishes even

stronger circumstantial evidence in support of the conclusion just reached on the basis of a comparison of the Eastern European performance with that of other middle-income regions. According to our source for 1938, China was then by far the poorest region of Asia. Its per-capita income was one-half that of South Asia and slightly over two-thirds that of Southeast Asia as gauged by the 'Indonesia and Philippines' aggregate. We have no data for 1948. However, since the destructions and disruptions undergone by China between 1938 and 1948, as a consequence of Japanese invasion and the civil war, have been much greater than those undergone by the other two regions—particularly South Asia—China's relative position on the eve of the establishment of Communist rule in 1948 could not have been any better than it was in 1938.

If this is indeed the case, the forty years of Communist rule have witnessed a major gain relative to South Asia and a minor gain (or a minor loss) relative to Southeast Asia. For in 1988 the Chinese GNP per capita was the same as that of South Asia (as against only one-half in 1938 and, presumably, in 1948) and 78 per cent of that of 'Indonesia and Philippines' (as against 68 per cent in 1938). (Since from 1960 onwards 'Indonesia and Philippines' has done worse than the larger Southeast Asian aggregate [see Table IV], it is quite possible that China's minor gain vis-à-vis Southeast Asia was in fact a minor loss.)

But whether China gained or lost relative to Southeast Asia, the gain or the loss was minor—certainly not as big as China's gain vis-à-vis South Asia—so that our previous conclusion stands. The economic failure of Communism is a failure only relative to the wholly unrealistic expectations and promises of the Communists themselves, who thought that they could uplift large demographic masses to match the standards of wealth of the West through a systematic delinking from the global circuits of capital. However, by no stretch of the imagination can this failure be called a failure relative to what has been achieved by regimes that ruled over regions at levels of income comparable to those of the regions under Communist rule, and that *did not* delink from the global circuits of capital. Closure or openness to the global circuits of capital seem to have made little difference in halting, let alone reversing, the overall trend towards an increasingly unequal global distribution of income.

Closure versus openness to the global circuits of capital has of course made a big difference in other respects. Most of all, it has made a difference in terms of status and power in the world system. For more than thirty years after the end of the Second World War, jointly or separately the USSR and China have managed to keep in check the global reach of US hegemony and to extend their own power networks into the South—from the Caribbean to Indochina, from Southern and Eastern Africa to the Middle East. Even at this moment of crisis, the weight of the USSR in world politics is far greater than that of all Latin American states put together, and that of China is far greater than that of all South Asian states put together—to take regions of comparable demographic size and per-capita income.

In addition, closure versus openness has made a big difference in the status and welfare of the lower social strata of the regions in question—strata that in middle- and low-income regions constitute anything between one-half and two-thirds of the population. As argued above, the USSR has probably done no better (and may have done worse) than Latin America in the 'race' to catch up with the standards of wealth set by the West. Yet, the lower social strata of its population have done incomparably better than the lower social strata of the population of Latin America (Brazil included) in improving their nutritional, health and educational standards. And the improvement has been even greater for the lower social strata of China in comparison with those of South Asia or Southeast Asia.

Though forgotten in this moment of crisis, these political and social achievements were and remain impressive. However, they were all along obscured and undermined by the claim and belief of the ruling groups of the Communist states (of the USSR in particular) that their domains were in the process of catching up with the standards of wealth set by the West when in fact they were falling increasingly behind those standards. As they fell behind, the capability of competing with the West militarily, diplomatically, culturally and scientifically diminished dramatically, while the social forces that had been brought into existence by relentless modernization began challenging the competence of the ruling elites to deliver what they had been promising. In the end, the structural inability of low- and middle-income regions to 'climb up' the global hierarchy of wealth became a factor of political and ideological crisis as much in the East as in the South. The greater political and social achievements of the regimes of the East simply made their crisis more visible and spectacular than that of the South.

## V Oligarchic Wealth and the Reproduction of Income Inequalities

The time has come to provide some plausible explanation of the seemingly 'iron law' of a global hierarchy of wealth that stays in place no matter what the governments on the lower rungs of the hierarchy do or do not do—regardless, that is, of whether they delink or do not delink from the global circuits of capital, pursue or do not pursue power and status in the interstate system, eliminate or do not eliminate inequalities among their subjects. It seems to me that a necessary step in the direction of such an explanation is to acknowledge that the standards of wealth enjoyed by the West correspond to what Roy Harrod once defined as 'oligarchic wealth' in opposition to 'democratic wealth'. These opposite notions were defined by Harrod with reference to personal wealth—broadly defined as long-term income—regardless of the nationality or residence of the persons concerned. Nevertheless, with few substantive modifications the same notions can be applied to the long-term incomes of individuals as members of particular 'national households' (states) enmeshed in global networks of trade and competing with one another for control over the human and natural resources of the planet.

In Harrod's conceptualization, democratic and oligarchic wealth are separated by 'an unbridgeable gulf'. Democratic wealth is the kind of command over resources that, in principle, is available to everyone in direct relation to the intensity and efficiency of his or her efforts. Oligarchic wealth, in contrast, bears no relation to the intensity and efficiency of the efforts of its recipients, and is never available to all no matter how intense and efficient their efforts are. This is so, according to Harrod, for two main reasons. The first reason corresponds to what we normally understand by *exploitation*. We cannot *all* command services and products that embody the time and effort of more than one person of average efficiency. If someone does, it means that somebody else is labouring for less than what he or she would command if all efforts of equal intensity and efficiency were rewarded equally. In addition, and this is the second reason, some resources are scarce in an absolute or relative sense, or are subject to congestion or crowding through extensive use. Their use or enjoyment, therefore, presupposes the *exclusion* of others either through a pricing or a rationing system and leads to the formation of rents and quasi-rents.<sup>6</sup>

The struggle to attain oligarchic wealth is thus inherently self-defeating. As underscored by Fred Hirsch—who rescued Harrod's notion of oligarchic wealth from oblivion—the idea that all can attain it is an illusion.

Acting alone, each individual seeks to make the best of his or her position. But satisfaction of these individual preferences itself alters the situation that faces others seeking to satisfy similar wants. A round of transactions to act out personal wants of this kind therefore leaves each individual with a worse bargain than was reckoned with when the transaction was undertaken, because the sum of such acts does not correspondingly improve the position of all individuals taken together. There is an 'adding-up' problem. Opportunities for economic advance, as they present themselves serially to one person after another, do not constitute equivalent opportunities for economic advance by all. What each one of us can achieve, all cannot.<sup>7</sup>

States pursuing national wealth in a capitalist world-economy face an 'adding-up' problem similar to, and in many ways more serious than, the one faced by individuals when they pursue personal wealth in a national economy. Opportunities for economic advance, as they present themselves serially to one state after another, do not constitute equivalent opportunities for economic advance by all states. Economic development in this sense is an illusion. The wealth of the West is analogous to Harrod's oligarchic wealth. It cannot be generalized because it is based on relational processes of exploitation and relational processes of exclusion that presuppose the continually reproduced relative deprivation of the majority of the world population.

Processes of exclusion are as important as processes of exploitation.

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<sup>6</sup> See Roy Harrod, 'The Possibility of Economic Satiation—Use of Economic Growth for Improving the Quality of Education and Leisure', in Committee for Economic Development, *Problems of United States Economic Development*, Volume 1, New York 1958.

<sup>7</sup> Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, Cambridge, Mass. 1976, pp. 4–5.

As used here, the latter refer to the fact that the absolute or relative poverty of the states situated on the lower rungs of the hierarchy of wealth of the world-economy continually induces the rulers and subjects of these states to participate in the world division of labour for marginal rewards that leave the bulk of the benefits in the hands of the rulers and subjects of the states positioned on the upper rungs. Processes of exclusion, in contrast, refer to the fact that the oligarchic wealth of the states on the upper rungs provides their rulers and subjects with the means necessary to exclude the rulers and subjects of the states on the lower rungs from the use and enjoyment of resources that are scarce or subject to congestion.

The two processes are distinct but complementary. Processes of exploitation provide wealthy states and their agents with the means to initiate and sustain processes of exclusion. And processes of exclusion generate the poverty necessary to induce the rulers and subjects of comparatively poor states to continually seek re-entry into the world division of labour on conditions favourable to wealthy states.

These complementary processes operate very unevenly in time and space. As a matter of fact, there are periods when they operate so ineffectively as to create the impression that many states are actually 'developing'—that is, that they are bridging the unbridgeable gulf that separates their poverty or modest wealth from the oligarchic wealth of the West. These are periods of systemic crisis during which the attempts of the majority to attain oligarchic wealth—which by definition cannot be generalized—threaten to make it vanish for the minority as well.

Crises of this kind tend to come about whenever the productive expansion of capital in core locations begins to face decreasing returns. This is what happened in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At that time a 'pay explosion'—as Phelps Brown has aptly called it<sup>8</sup>—swept most of Western Europe and, to a lesser extent, North America and Japan. It was the first sign that the productive expansion of capital in core locations was fast approaching the point of decreasing returns. The pay explosion was still in full swing when there occurred the first 'oil shock' of 1973, itself the most visible sign of a more general increase in the prices of primary products after twenty years of relative losses. Reduced by both rising wages and rising prices of imported raw materials, the profitability of productive expansion in core locations declined and capital sought valorization in new directions.

Two main directions were open to capitalist expansion. On the one hand, productive expansion could continue in more peripheral locations that had not been affected by rising labour costs or had benefited from the higher prices of primary products. On the other hand, productive expansion could cease and profits and other pecuniary surpluses could be invested in financial speculation aimed

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<sup>8</sup> E.H. Phelps Brown, 'A Non-Monetarist View of the Pay Explosion', *Three Banks Review*, 1975, p. 105.

at acquiring rent-bearing assets and claims to governmental revenues at bargain prices. For most of the 1970s these two kinds of expansion sustained one another in generating a massive flow of capital and other resources towards low- and middle-income states. In the 1980s, in contrast, the second kind of expansion eclipsed the first and led to a major swing of financial and other resources back to core locations.

The swing in both directions (towards more peripheral locations and away from them) was made more violent by the fact that in the 1970s most governments in the West—first and foremost the US government—continued to pursue productive expansion within their territorial domains without realizing that such an expansion was undermining profitability, and thereby killing the goose that lay the golden eggs. As profitability in core locations was driven further down by governmental policies, capital flew towards more peripheral locations and towards forms of investment—such as dollar-denominated deposits in select Western European banks—that were beyond the reach of governments.

This disjuncture between the requirements of core capital and the policies of core governments created the conditions for the general economic advance of the 1970s—the only time in fifty years when all the low- and middle-income regions and jurisdictions for which we have data (with the only exception of South Asia) seemed to be narrowing the income gaps that separated them from the organic core (see Tables II, III and IV). It was at this time that low- and, above all, middle-income states were flooded with offers by core capitalist institutions of practically unlimited credit lines for productive or unproductive investments as well as of joint ventures and other forms of assistance in setting up production facilities in competition with one another and with core locations. Not even Communist states were discriminated against. On the contrary, some of them were among the main beneficiaries of this sudden cornucopia and moved quickly to hook up to the global circuits of capital by assuming financial obligations among the heaviest in the world.<sup>9</sup>

The cornucopia—such as it was—was bound to be short-lived. For one thing, the sudden abundance of means enjoyed by low- and middle-income states led to a generalization and intensification of competing developmental efforts oriented towards one form or another of industrialization. These efforts were inherently self-defeating. On the one hand, they tightened world scarcities of inputs that were crucial to their success. On the other hand, they created an overabundance of their most typical outputs, thereby depreciating their value on world markets. Sooner or later the moment of truth would come—the moment, that is, when only the most competitive of these efforts would reap the benefits of industrialization, while all the other efforts would be stranded with benefits that fell far short of the costs—including the costs of servicing the debts incurred in the process. At that point, the cornucopia turned into its opposite. Credit and other kinds of assistance were tightened and the losers were

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<sup>9</sup> See Iliana Zloch-Christy, *Debt Problems of Eastern Europe*, Cambridge 1987.



forced to alienate their most valuable assets, or their future revenues, or both, as the only way in which they could prevent losing all credit.

Moreover, the abundance of means enjoyed by low- and middle-income states in the 1970s tended to eliminate the disjuncture between the enhanced speculative predispositions of core capital and the policies of core governments. The more core capital trickled down to low- and middle-income states, the more core governments realized that their attempts to harness capital to productive expansion within their domains were not only ineffectual but were leading to a generalization of developmental efforts that threatened the stability of the hierarchy of wealth on which their power rested. At the same time, the more valorization of core capital came to depend on the alienation of the revenues and assets of low- and middle-income states, the more core capital required the assistance of core governments in legitimizing and enforcing the alienation.

Between 1979 (second 'oil shock') and 1982 (Mexican default) the tide turned. The Reagan-Thatcher counterrevolution set in, and the general crisis of developmental efforts (South and East) was precipitated. Core governments began offering maximum freedom of action to capitalist institutions engaged in financial speculation, and further encouraged this tendency by alienating their own assets and future revenues at bargain prices. On top of it, core governments acting separately or in concert offered to core capital all the assistance that was in their power to give in inducing low- and middle-income states to fulfil their debt obligations.

Needless to say, capital responded enthusiastically to this 'new deal' with which neither the South nor the East could possibly compete. Thus, while the party for the South and the East was over, the peoples of the West—or at least their upper strata—came to enjoy a *belle époque* in many ways reminiscent of the 'beautiful times' of the European bourgeoisie eighty years earlier. The most striking similarity between the two *belles époques* is the almost complete lack of realization on the part of their beneficiaries that the sudden and unprecedented prosperity that they had come to enjoy did not rest on a resolution of the crisis of accumulation that had preceded the beautiful times. On the contrary, the newly found prosperity rested on a shift of the crisis from one set of relations to another set of relations. It was only a question of time before the crisis would 'bounce back' in far more troublesome forms on those who thought that they never had it so good.

## VI The Tadpole Philosophy and the Future of Socialism

The *belle époque* of the early twentieth century ended in a period of systemic chaos (1914–48) characterized by wars, revolutions and a deepening crisis of global processes of capital accumulation. It is quite possible that the *belle époque* of the late twentieth century is about to end in a period of systemic chaos in some respects analogous to (but in other respects quite different from) the period 1914–48. If that is the case, the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe will be seen

in retrospect as the end rather than as the beginning of an era of prosperity and security for the West. The fact that the collapse of Communism was immediately followed by the Iraqi-Kuwaiti crisis and the first serious recession of the US economy since 1982 suggests that this might well be the case.

There is no point in speculating on the form and the sequence of the events that will characterize the period of systemic chaos that lies in front of us. To a large extent they are unpredictable and, in any case, they are irrelevant to the purposes of the article. Nevertheless, the world-systemic tendencies that will shape the events for some time to come are neither unpredictable nor irrelevant to our present purposes. In this final section of the article, I shall therefore outline briefly these tendencies and spell out their main implications for the future of socialism.

In geopolitical terms, the main factor underlying the systemic chaos of 1914-48 was a deepening and widening conflict internal to the West—with Japan already joining in as an honorary member—over the territorial division of the world among rising and declining powers (so-called 'imperialism'). And its main outcome was the rise of antisystemic forces that eventually led to the institution of the West, East and South as distinct and relatively autonomous geopolitical entities. The main factor underlying the systemic chaos that lies ahead of us, in contrast, is a deepening and widening conflict internal to the disintegrating East and South over increasingly scarce world-economic resources. And its main outcome is likely to be the creation of structures of world government—initially promoted by the West—which will eventually lead to a more or less complete supersession of the already crumbling geopolitical tripartition of the world into West, East and South. In short, what was 'made' in the course of the previous period of systemic chaos is likely to be 'unmade' in the course of the next.

This pattern has already been in evidence over the last ten years or so. Thus, the Iraqi-Kuwaiti feud, itself rooted in the previous and far more serious Iraqi-Iranian conflict, has induced the US and its closest allies to boost back into life dormant structures of world government—most notably, the UN Security Council—as the one and only way in which they could legitimately and successfully intervene to solve intra-South conflicts to their own satisfaction. Moreover, neither the escalation of conflicts within the South over the appropriation and utilization of oil rent, nor the use by the US and its allies of the UN Security Council as an instrument of violent conflict-resolution, would have been possible without the prior partial disintegration of the East under the pressure of conflicts of its own.

The social forces that underlie this pattern can be expected to grow stronger rather than weaker over the next decade or two. For these forces are the expression, on the one hand, of the irreversible changes that have occurred in the social structure of the world-economy between 1950 and 1980 and, on the other hand, of the situation of absolute and relative deprivation engendered by those changes in the

South and in the East in the 1980s. As long as the processes of exploitation and exclusion that continually reproduce the oligarchic wealth of the West and the absolute and relative deprivation of the South and of the East remain in place, conflicts in low- and middle-income regions will be endemic and will pose increasingly intractable problems of world-system regulation for the West. Since for the time being the dominant disposition of the West is to use its power and plenty to preserve at all costs rather than reform (let alone revolutionize) the existing hierarchy of wealth, we can confidently predict that for some time to come each conflict resolution imposed or sponsored by the West will be but a preamble to a further escalation of conflicts at some later point in time.

The continual, though not continuous, escalation of conflicts in the South and in the East, in turn, can be expected to generate contradictory tendencies within the West itself. On the one hand, the governments and peoples of the West will be induced to develop ever closer forms of mutual cooperation aimed at administering and protecting the global networks of trade and accumulation on which their oligarchic wealth rests. On the other hand, an increasing number and variety of peoples in the West will find that in so far as they are concerned the costs of protecting oligarchic wealth are exceeding the benefits that they derive from it. While the first tendency can be expected to lead to a further strengthening of existing structures of world government and to the creation of new ones, the second tendency can be expected to lead to major conflicts over the distribution of the costs involved in the protection of oligarchic wealth or even over the advisability of continuing to pursue oligarchic wealth when its costs equal or exceed its benefits for an increasing number of strata in the West.

The combination of these two tendencies will present socialist forces in the West with a major dilemma. Throughout the twentieth century, these forces have wittingly or unwittingly identified themselves ever more closely with one variant or another of developmentalism. As Immanuel Wallerstein has pointed out, this identification constitutes a major departure from the ideals of human solidarity and equality that constitute the essence of the socialist creed. For developmental ideology is merely the global version of R.H. Tawney's Tadpole Philosophy.<sup>30</sup>

It is possible that intelligent tadpoles reconcile themselves to the inconveniences of their position, by reflecting that, though most of them will live and die as tadpoles and nothing more, the more fortunate of the species will one day shed their tails, distend their mouths and stomachs, hop nimbly on to dry land, and croak addresses to their former friends on the virtues by means of which tadpoles of character and capacity can rise to be frogs. This conception of society may be described, perhaps, as the Tadpole Philosophy, since the consolation which it offers for social evils consists in the statement that exceptional individuals can succeed in evading them . . . And what a view of human life such an attitude implies! As though opportunities for talents to rise could be equalized in a society

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<sup>30</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, New York 1979, p. 76.

where circumstances surrounding it from birth are themselves unequal! As though, if they could, it were natural and proper that the position of the mass of mankind should permanently be such that they can attain civilization only by escaping from it! As though the noblest use of exceptional powers were to scramble to shore, undeterred by the thought of drowning companions!<sup>11</sup>

After quoting this passage, Wallerstein goes on to say that '[for] those who do not wish to "scramble to shore", the alternative is to seek to transform the system as a whole rather than profit from it. This I take to be the defining feature of a socialist movement. The touchstone of legitimacy of such a movement would be the extent to which the totality of its actions contributed, to the maximum degree possible, to the rapid transformation of the present world-system, involving the eventual replacement of the capitalist world-economy by a socialist world government.'<sup>12</sup>

Fifteen years ago—when the above was written—Wallerstein's advice to work towards the creation of a socialist world government sounded fanciful or worse. While the very notion of a world government seemed wholly unrealistic, the notion of a *socialist* world government had been completely discredited by the practices of the various Socialist Internationals, which had either failed in their purposes or had turned into instruments of domination of the weak by the powerful. Moreover, in the 1970s most variants of developmentalism (socialist variants included) seemed to be delivering at least something of what they had promised. To work towards the creation of a socialist world government thus appeared as neither feasible nor advisable.

Today, the notion of a world government seems less fanciful than fifteen years ago. The Group of Seven has been meeting regularly and has come to look more and more like a committee for managing the common affairs of the world bourgeoisie. In the 1980s, the IMF and the World Bank have acted increasingly like a world ministry of finance. Last but not least, the 1990s have been inaugurated by the refurbishing of the UN Security Council as a world ministry of police. In totally unplanned fashion, a structure of world government is being put in place bit by bit under the pressure of events by the great economic and political powers themselves.

To be sure, the whole process of world-government formation has been sponsored and controlled by conservative forces preoccupied almost exclusively with the legitimation and enforcement of the extremely unequal global distribution of wealth that has emerged with the collapse of the developmental efforts of the South and of the East in the 1980s. As a matter of fact, it can hardly have been an accident that the process of world-government formation sped up precisely when the developmental efforts collapsed. Most likely, the speed-up has been nothing but a pragmatic response to the political and

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<sup>11</sup> R.H. Tawney, *Equality*, New York 1961, pp. 108–9.

<sup>12</sup> Wallerstein, p. 101.

ideological void left in the interstate system by the collapse of developmentalism. How—it might well be asked—can a process that has developed to legitimate and enforce world inequalities be turned into a means to the end of promoting greater world equality and solidarity?

In an age of rampant greed and of collapse of the socialist projects of the past, the endeavour naturally looks hopeless. Yet, take another fifteen-year step forward—this time into the future. As mentioned, the structural problems that lay at the roots of the process of world-government formation can be expected to have become more rather than less serious. But while the process of world-government formation will be far more advanced than it is now, the costs of systemic chaos for the peoples of the West will also be much higher. Protection costs in particular—broadly understood to include not just investments in means of violence and armed forces, but also bribes and other payments to clients and friendly forces in the disintegrating East and South, as well as costly or irreparable damages to the human psyche—will have escalated to the point where the pursuit of oligarchic wealth will begin to appear to many as what it has always been: a highly destructive endeavour that shifts the costs of the prosperity and security of a minority (no more, and probably less, than one-sixth of the human race) onto the majority and onto the future generations of the minority itself.

At that point, the addresses croaked by Western 'frogs' to the 'tadpoles' of the former East and South will sound anachronistic to the 'frogs' themselves, or at least to a growing number of them. Western socialists will then face their own moment of truth. Either they will join forces with Eastern and Southern associates and come up with an intellectual project and a political programme capable of transforming systemic chaos into a more equal and solidary world order, or their appeals to human progress and social justice will lose all residual credibility.

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## Perestroika Suicide: Not By *Bred* Alone\*

Milton produced *Paradise Lost* for the same reason that a silk worm produces silk. It was an activity of his nature. Later he sold the product for five pounds.

Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* (1861–63)

In this citation from *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx tries by his very punctuation to keep cultural production separate from the marketplace. One hundred years later, his Soviet misinterpreters were still doggedly maintaining that separation. One hundred and thirty years later, Marx's organicist notion of creative work reads like a utopian tract from an ancient—that is to say, pre-Marxist—civilization. It makes more sense that Milton, the poet, might write these lines about Marx than that Marx, the debunked political economist of Communism, could write these lines about Milton.<sup>1</sup>

To reduce perestroika (1985–90) to its *economic* manifestations—that is, to its failures—is, of course, to conflate its eventual consequences with the many-sided historical process itself, including its cultural successes. At the same time, to lament the (inaccurate) redefinition of perestroika in predominantly economic terms—cooperatives, joint ventures, privatization and so forth—is to deflect attention from something more important, namely, the ways in

which culture has been transformed by those same economic considerations. This reality can, in fact, best be acknowledged by those (each for different reasons) who either specifically are *not* in culture or specifically *are* in economics. Thus, it is not that perestroika came to be concerned with economics rather than with culture, but rather that culture, passing through the historical period of perestroika, came at last, for better or worse, to be defined and restricted by economic realities.

### Decanonization

It is an oft-repeated joke among Soviet citizens and Sovietologists that many countries have an unpredictable future, but only the Soviet Union has an unpredictable past. The disappearances of Trotsky under Stalin, of Stalin under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, and of Khrushchev under Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko, are a set of cultural enactments that prefigure the political *matreshki* of the perestroika period. Perestroika's transformation of the traditional *matreshki*—Russian stacking dolls that consist of identical but diminishing wooden figurines representing maidens in native costume—into governmental *patreshki* marks an inevitable and natural evolution, a harmless and parodic (note this unusual combination) diminishment of a traumatic historical past.

This compulsion to render the past unpredictable, to 'undocument' Soviet reality—in airbrushed photographs, warehoused statues, buried monuments, recut films, re-edited manuscripts—was most articulately expressed in the *errata* slip to the 1954 edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, advising its readers to use scissors or a razor blade to remove 'Beria' and insert an expanded entry on 'Bering Sea'. This

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\* The title's pun refers both to Vladimir Dudintsev's Thaw-era novel *Not By Bread Alone* (1956) and to the oft-characterized *brud* (raving, delirium) of the perestroika era. The economic stability—and abundance of bread—during Khrushchev's Thaw period empowered the intelligentsia to assert in the name of the people that 'man does not live by bread alone,' but also (implicitly) by spiritual and cultural sustenance. The economic instability—and scarcity *even* of bread—during Gorbachev's perestroika period has reduced the newly won cultural freedom celebrated by the intelligentsia to a kind of *brud* in the eyes of many discouraged citizens.

The epigraph text in the original German reads: 'Milton produzierte das "Paradise Lost" aus demselben Grund, aus dem ein Seidenwurm Seide produziert. Es war eine Betätigung seiner Natur. Er verkaufte später das Produkt für 5 £.' Karl Marx, *Theorien über den Mehrwert* (1861–63) [Marx's italics].

<sup>1</sup> Research for this article was made possible by John G. Bowman faculty grants from the Nationalities Rooms and Intercultural Exchange Program, University of Pittsburgh and research grants from the Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh. The article was written for the second annual meeting of the Working Group on Contemporary Soviet Culture, Berkeley, California, June 1991, sponsored by the Joint Committee on Soviet Studies with funds provided by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council. We would like to express our appreciation for the advice, support and assistance we have received from the members of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Pittsburgh and the members of the Working Group on Contemporary Soviet Culture, as well as Aleksandr Kabakov and Ol'ga Lipovskaya. The opinions expressed in this article bear no earthly resemblance to the views of the above-mentioned. The authors take full responsibility for their own *brud*.



slip, a kind of ode to Conceptualism before its time, was supplied to all encyclopedia subscribers.

What has intrigued Western observers about this decanonization process is not the fact of decanonization itself (for, after all, the West, too, has its fashions, its market demands, its internal mechanisms for change). More striking has been the insistent official denial that an earlier text ever existed and that, as a result, very little can afford to be New—one of the most valuable words in capital's advertising vocabulary—since to be New is to expose historical disjuncture.

Accordingly, in the sixty years between Lenin and Gorbachev, to cease to be holy has not meant to become profane, or even to be forgotten and disappear. Instead, it has meant the erasure of existence, except within a morally precarious netherworld known only to a small segment of the urban intelligentsia and described only by unofficial oral discourse (a conversation, an unpublished interview, a moment of improvisation in a theatre performance) rather than by recorded texts (literature, television, film, radio). Unofficial culture, therefore—whether we are speaking of Beria or Sakharov—became like sounds that could perhaps be uttered aloud, but did not figure in the orthography of official culture.

One of the results of this activity of undocumenting the past has been the emergence of a very different readership than in the West, one that is aware of the perishability of a given reading; of its fragility in the face of the state; of its vulnerability at any moment to displacement by political circumstances to another status or another reading; of being replaced at any moment not by another fashion, another superstar, another masterpiece, but by the Bering Sea.

The liberal-democrat *perestroisebnik*, whose inchoate cry calls for full larders and revered poets (a combination unobserved in any known civilization), has come to understand the historical necessity of changing geographical names back to their 'original'—that is, pre-revolutionary—appellations: Karl Marx Street back to Staraya Basmannaya, Kalinin back to Tver, Brezhnev back to Naberezhnye chelny. He would equally advocate returning Gorky back to its famous marketplace name, Nizhnii Novgorod, seeing in this act a settling of accounts with Soviet power, if only because of its treatment of Sakharov. The erasure of the literary reference in this instance is a small price to pay; indeed, the fact that culture with a capital 'C' spells 'totalitarianism' is most evident in the case of Gorky, whether we are speaking of literature or geography. But then it turns out that Tchaikovsky Street belongs to the same ideological and municipal superstructure. That is to say, if Karl Marx Street must revert to Staraya Basmannaya, then it is not surprising that Tchaikovsky must revert to Novinskii bul'var.

Perestroika voluntaristically freed culture from its servitude as handmaiden to politics, whether culture desired to be freed or not. As a result of this liberation, culture can no longer aspire to its former enslavement, a condition that had been as necessary for the main-

tenance of totalitarianism as culture's disposability—or perhaps recyclability is a more appropriate metaphor for the 1990s—is for the management of capital abroad. This is in no way to suggest that high culture will cease to exist in the Soviet Union. The astonished visitor to Bayreuth's Wagner Festspiel, with its crying towels, its oval promenade, and its exhibition of the opera audience in photographs displayed in the town's shop windows, or Britain's Glyndebourne, with its formal dress on public transport and its picnic hampers of potted shrimp and champagne, can attest that capital has preserved its own oases, where the tenets of its belief system are acted out and its sacred reliquiae are displayed.

It is rather to suggest that post-perestroika culture will involve considerable displacement for the urban intelligentsia, who have had relatively easy and inexpensive access to a small arena of high culture. This displacement is radically different from previous historical displacements described earlier; it is no longer 'Beria', the encyclopedia entry, that is displaced, but rather the encyclopedia subscribers themselves. The *errata* slip of today recommends that the text remain, but the reader be changed. In moving towards a market economy, of which it has been taught to disapprove for seventy years and according to whose postulates it has not historically excelled, the Soviet cultural establishment confronts the fact that previous representations of the merchant—the intransigent and insular Old Believer, the alien Western capitalist, the misguided and naive financier of the October Revolution, the lovable and vulgar NEPman, the local Moscow *raketti*, the rapacious Tagi-zade<sup>2</sup>—profoundly problematize culture's role in emerging market conditions, where culture has gained its political freedom while losing both its audience and its economic security.

### Dismantling 'Personality Cults'

As much as the six years of the Gorbachev administration have been imprinted with the personalities of the leading political contenders—Egor Ligachev, Eduard Shevardnadze, Aleksandr Yakovlev, Boris Yeltsin and, of course, Gorbachev himself—the period from 1985 to 1991 has been as marked by the dismantling of a number of personality cults. While the term 'personality cult' traditionally refers to the

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<sup>2</sup> Ismail Tagi-zade, sporting white suits and stetsons, has emerged as the most flamboyant of the new robber-barons in the Soviet Union. During the Stagnation Era he was a mid-level functionary in Goskino (the State Committee on Cinematography). Since the onset of perestroika he has become a hard-currency multi-millionaire (by selling stallions to the West) and a soft-currency multi-billionaire (by receiving commissions on all flower sales in Soviet cities). His current project is an attempt to establish a monopoly over film distribution and screenings throughout the USSR. Tagi-zade's organization (ASKIN) is flooding movie-theatres with grade-C American films—reportedly ASKIN acquired rights for more than 160 films at the Los Angeles Film Market in 1991—as a way of bankrupting both the official film industry and the unofficial network of video halls. Among Tagi-zade's employees are many of the *apparatchiks* who earlier controlled the Soviet film industry, including his former boss Filip Ermaash (head of Goskino until 1986). See, for example, Sergei Filipov, 'Kino s kommunisticheskim litsom', *Ognyok* 10, March 1991, pp. 30–31; Aleksei German, 'Maska, ia tebia znaiu?', *Moskovskie novosti*, 12 May 1991; Oleg Rudnev, 'Kakoe kino nam propolabet doktor Tagi-zade?', *Izvestiya*, 6 May 1991.

cult surrounding Stalin, in its broader application the term denotes the entire form of political organization centred on the male figure worshipped for his immanent good (or bad) qualities. Stalin is thus neither the only nor the first such cult figure, as has been convincingly demonstrated elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Since the attempted assassination of Lenin by Fania Kaplan on 30 August 1918, official politics has promulgated a clear, if historically contradictory, hagiography (or demonology) of its cult figures, of which the most notable besides Stalin have been Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, and the General Secretary currently in power.

Within the field of political culture, as it has been constituted for six decades, two of these cult figures—Lenin and the reigning General Secretary—have been uniformly positive. Two—Trotsky and Bukharin—have been uniformly negative. Stalin, a significant deity precisely because of his capacity for transmogrification, has been subject to enormous fluctuation in response to immediate official needs—compare, for example, the Stalin of 1945–53, the Stalin of 1956, the Stalin of the 1970s, and the Stalin of 1987, to cite four major metamorphoses.

During Gorbachev's tenure as General Secretary and President of the Soviet Union, each of these political cults has undergone severe destabilization. Stalin, the most unstable figure and therefore the most responsive to policy change, has become simultaneously the historical norm and the most extreme deviation in the development of socialist society (a contradiction that requires no resolution); the mummified Lenin has gradually begun to be humanized (if not yet interred)<sup>4</sup>; Bukharin and, more cautiously, Trotsky, have been selectively rehabilitated; and even the reigning General Secretary has become the subject of political cartoons in the Soviet press.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For an examination of the formation and development of the cult of Lenin, see Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*, Cambridge, Mass. 1983. For a discussion of the flip side of cult creation, see Richard Stites, 'Iconoclastic Currents in the Russian Revolution: Destroying and Preserving the Past', in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenz and Richard Stites, eds., *Bolshevik Culture: Experiments and Order in the Russian Revolution*, Bloomington 1985, pp. 1–24.

<sup>4</sup> Theatre director Mark Rozovsky's call for Lenin's body to be removed from the mausoleum and given a decent burial ignores the fact that a 'decent burial' for the ruling class has indeed customarily been precisely in a crypt—that Glyndebourne of cemetery life—rather than in the earth. Lenin's embalmers were merely fulfilling the appropriate rites normally accorded to the leader of the ruling ideology, be he a Romanov, a Roosevelt, a Rockefeller, or an *ABOL* comrade.

<sup>5</sup> See Serge Schmemmann's sampling of Soviet cartoons directed at Gorbachev in the *New York Times*, 5 May 1991. By far the most significant among the cartoons is the caricature of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev that appeared in the officious journal *Krasnodol*. However uncritical Gorbachev's representation—as attentive tailor, assiduously stitching together a torn Soviet Union—his very presence on the pages of *Krasnodol* implies the possibility of his future appearance in a more negative image. Thus his negative representation in the so-called independent press is, while more critical, less significant than his mere appearance on the pages of *Krasnodol*. For a discussion of the continuing hypersensitivity surrounding the new 'cult of the President', see Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov, 'Makulakul' tara. Reprocessing Culture' *October* 57, 1991, pp. 95–6.

## Dismantling 'Creator Cults'

While the political culture has been undergoing these changes, the field of *cultural politics* during this same period (1985–91) has been marked by its own consistent, if not entirely deliberate and anticipated, dismantling of 'creator cults', both official and unofficial. The cult of the great Artist precedes the advent of Soviet power by some thirty-seven years; the institutional roots of this practice can be traced back at least to the celebration surrounding the unveiling of the monument to Aleksandr Pushkin in 1880.<sup>6</sup> Soviet cultural administrators, however, did not restrict themselves merely to perpetuating the cult of Pushkin. Instead, the very principle of 'creator cults' became the operative model for propagandizing and defending the accomplishments of the single, reified Artist within cultural production.

The 'creator cult', complete with its own particular hagiography, martyrology or soteriology, formed the basis for both official and oppositional cultural histories of the Soviet Union: Vladimir Mayakovsky and Sergei Esenin in official histories of poetry, Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandel'shtam in oppositional histories; Yurii Olesha and Mikhail Sholokhov in official histories of prose, Boris Pasternak and Vladimir Nabokov in oppositional histories; the Vasil'ev 'brothers' and Sergei Gerasimov in official histories of cinema, Sergei Paradzhanov and Andrei Tarkovsky in oppositional ones; and so on. While the iconostasis of official culture was perhaps more rigidly constructed and maintained than that of unofficial culture, the *chîn* (rank) of official culture and the *ryad* (row) of unofficial culture were nevertheless implicitly present.

Two 'creator cults' in particular have dominated Soviet culture since the mid 1970s: the cult of the exiled prose writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and that of the deceased guitar-poet Vladimir Vysotsky. Though Solzhenitsyn and Vysotsky lacked any significant aesthetic or cultural intersections, as cultural phenomena they shared two qualities: first, an appeal that ran counter to clear-cut and established divisions between the city and the country, the educated and uneducated, and, most important, the politically empowered and the politically disenfranchised; second, they shared a similar political trajectory: a brief period of official tolerance followed by a prolonged period of official disapproval.<sup>7</sup> Unofficially, of course, the works of both producers circulated throughout Soviet society in ever increasing amounts—Solzhenitsyn's books in *samizdat* and later in *tamizdat*

<sup>6</sup> See Marcus C. Levitt, *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration*, Ithaca 1989. The intersection between 'cults of personality' and 'creator cults'—that is, between political culture and cultural politics—is at the centre of Yurii Mamin's 1990 film *Bahushardy* ('Sideburns'). In one of the film's most breathtaking sequences—from the point of view of Soviet and émigré audiences—a sculptor converts his bust of Lenin into a bust of Pushkin with a minimum of effort.

<sup>7</sup> In the case of Solzhenitsyn and Vysotsky, official tolerance extended to the very top of the political hierarchy: Krushchev personally interceded to ensure the publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (*Neznyi mir* 12, 1962); Brezhnev was an avid listener to Vysotsky's guitar-poems, of which his reported favourite was 'Kon' privedlivye'.

(foreign-based publishing, smuggled back in) Vysotsky's guitar-poems on *magnitizdat* (unofficial tape-recording). It is not surprising, therefore, that all histories of contemporary culture in the Soviet Union for the past two decades have been overdetermined by the personalities and reputations of these two figures. They have been the determining absence in official histories and the determining presence in oppositional ones.

Between 1986 and 1991 virtually the entire output of both cultural producers was made available through official outlets to cultural consumers in the Soviet Union. The Disputes Commission (Union of Cinematographers—Goskino) negotiated the release of all the 'shelved films' starring Vysotsky or featuring his songs; several collections of his guitar-poems and prose works were published; Melodiya released two double-albums of his most popular songs and began to issue a seventeen-record set, 'Vladimir Vysotsky in Concert'.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, almost all of Solzhenitsyn's prose was published in the Soviet Union in 1989–90; while several journals began to serialize individual parts of his four-volume fictionalized history of World War I, *Red Wheel*, Solzhenitsyn's major books—*First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, *Collected Stories and Articles*, and the three volumes of *Gulag Archipelago*—were printed by a number of official publishing houses. All of these books are easily available at most of the bookstands and kiosks for between twenty-five to thirty-five roubles a volume.<sup>9</sup> Even Solzhenitsyn's most recent essay, 'How Shall We Restructure Russia?', containing his prophetic vision and prescription for the break-up of the Soviet empire and the resurrection of a purified Russian state, was published immediately in the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup>

Yet despite the accompanying media fanfare, both of these events

<sup>8</sup> While earlier publications of Vysotsky's guitar-poems have disappeared from the marketplace (*Nova* [Moskva, Sovremennik, 1982]; *Chetyre chetyverti parti* [Moskva, Fizkul'tura i sport, 1988]; *Ya hochu vernuts'* [Moskva, Kniga, 1988]; and several others), the most recent two-volume collection of guitar-poems and prose continues to be readily available for forty roubles at most of the unofficial (that is, high-mark-up) bookstands and kiosks throughout Moscow. The two double-albums—*Synov'ya nakhodyut v noi* (1986) and *Obitaki na volnakh* (1990)—and the sixteen concert albums that have been released so far are stocked in all official record stores in Moscow and sell for between 2.50 to 3.50 roubles an album.

<sup>9</sup> The first parts of *Krasnoe koleto* appeared in 1990: *Av gust Chetyrnatitsatogo in Zvezda* (nos. 1–12, 1990), *Oktiabr' Shestnadtsatogo in Nash sovremennik* (nos. 1–12, 1990), and the first part of *Mart Semnadtsatogo in Nova* (nos. 1–6, 1990). The second part of *Mart Semnadtsatogo* is scheduled to appear in *Nova* in 1991, the fourth part in *Zvezda*, and *April' Semnadtsatogo in Novyi mir*. *Novyi mir* also serialized *V Argo perem* (nos. 1–5, 1990) and *Rubnyi korpus* (nos. 6–8, 1990). As the editorial to this last work indicates, the journal had already 'accepted the work in the summer of 1967 but was unable to publish it then for reasons that had nothing to do with the journal' (no. 6, 1990, p. 4). For a valuable summary of Soviet reactions to the publication of *Gulag*, see John B. Dunlop, 'Reactions in the USSR to Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*', *Report on the USSR*, 9 March 1990, pp. 3–5.

<sup>10</sup> See *Kommunist'skaya pravda* and *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 18 September 1990.

were greeted with a deafening silence by cultural consumers.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in the peculiar logic of the Soviet cultural economy—where the availability of a cultural commodity for open and public purchase is invariably a sign of its increasing social irrelevance, and where relevant cultural commodities (books, tickets to the theatre or concerts, and so forth) are 'obtainable' not 'purchasable' (*dobutno* versus *kupit*)—the works of Solzhenitsyn and Vysotsky are in danger of disappearing into the paper-pulping plants, following in the footsteps of other socially irrelevant authors, such as Brezhnev and Chernenko.

The growing irrelevance even of Solzhenitsyn as a living rebuke to Soviet society is most painfully acknowledged by émigré critic Aleksandr Genis:

Even Solzhenitsyn, who for many years has been made to speak out by forces both here [in the West] and there [in the USSR], has turned out to be 'not up to snuff'. His composition was received in the spirit it deserved—a run-of-the-mill literary opus by a classic writer. The Solzhenitsyn 'feasibility study' is a plan for some other country, like business advice for the reconstruction of Byzantium. An entertaining endeavour, but not much use to Istanbul, which never again will become Constantinople.<sup>12</sup>

Moscow critic Natal'ya Ivanova looks back at this living monument with similar ambivalence: 'On the day when they had the Solzhenitsyn Readings in the Writers' Union, the whole country was in shock after [Prime Minister] Ryzhkov's announcement about price restrictions for non-Moscow residents. That day in Moscow was not Solzhenitsyn Day, but the first day of passport-fixing.'<sup>13</sup>

Solzhenitsyn, it must be remembered, has gone through nearly as many transmutations in his thirty years of public significance as has Stalin in his seventy years. The Solzhenitsyn of 1962–64, whose candidacy for the Lenin Prize was furiously debated in writers' meetings and on the pages of *Pravda*, *Izvestiya*, and *Literaturnaya gazeta*<sup>14</sup>; the Solzhenitsyn of 1974, whose *Gulag Archipelago* had just appeared in the West; the Solzhenitsyn of 1987, whose presence was the major challenge to perestroika; the Solzhenitsyn of 1989, whose

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<sup>11</sup> In its 3 October 1990 edition—that is, two weeks after Solzhenitsyn's essay appeared on its pages—*Literaturnaya gazeta* ran a full page of material (three articles and a collective letter from Kazakhstan) responding to the essay. The editors prefaced the articles by expressing their 'certainty that readers' letters to *Lg* will contain an enormous number of responses to Solzhenitsyn's work' and promised to make 'available space on [its] pages [to publish] the most interesting ones'. This two-week delay and the subsequent failure to publish unsolicited readers' responses strongly suggests that few were received. Instead, *Literaturnaya gazeta* began to run an irregular column entitled 'God Solzhenitsyns', in which the paper prints selected answers by established literary critics to three questions posed by the editors.

<sup>12</sup> 'Posle perestroiki', *Panorama* 325 (3–10 May 1990), p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> 'Mekhdu kazarmoi i rynkom', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 27 June 1990.

<sup>14</sup> *Pravda*, 30 January 1964; *Izvestiya*, 15 January 1964; *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 8 February 1964; see also Vladimir Lakshin, *Nezryi mir vo vremena Khrushcheva: dnevniki i zapiski* (1953–64), Knizhnaya palata, Moscow 1991.

textual return to the Soviet Union raised the apparition of his imminent physical return—all these must now reckon with the Solzhenitsyn of 1991, whose lengthy works have sorely tested the limit of *New World* (*Novyi mir*) in a radically different (and less inspiring) way than thirty years earlier under Khrushchev.

Solzhenitsyn, a chronicler of apocryphal texts admitted into Church scripture just as the Church itself disbands, has proven too prolific for current Soviet publishing norms. He can no longer expect to be exempt from existing norms, as he was with respect to US publishing norms in the 1970s and 1980s. The violation of those US economic—that is, market-driven—norms was permitted, in part, due to his corresponding success in violating Soviet political norms. Thus the interdependence of perestroika and Western capital (business ventures, educational exchanges, joint data-base projects, cultural events) was long prefigured by the interdependence of the Stagnation period and Western capital (news media and publishing, weapons-systems analyses, not to mention an entire micro-industry of Sovietology). With the demise of Communism as a 'real, existing' economic and political system (as distinct from an ideology), we shall probably never again in our lifetimes see such licence of length given to a Soviet writer published in the United States. Put differently, nowadays no political reasons are compelling enough to warrant such a violation of market norms.

In the Soviet Union, both the political and cultural oppositions, echoing the totalitarian strains of official politics and culture, have until recently been unable to make sense of a Solzhenitsyn hopelessly out of touch with the political realities of the three Russias (Great, Small and White). Nor have they been any more astute in recognizing that Sakharov, for all his stature as a symbol of moral intransigence, was usually inarticulate, indecisive and, yes, contradictory. To notice was already potentially to engage in the dismantling of the cult. These hagiographic 'slippages', therefore, were of necessity explained by subordinating them to those 'unfathomable' species that were Stalin or Sakharov, Lenin or Solzhenitsyn. The old ritual dance between the totems of political culture and cultural politics (Khrushchev and Solzhenitsyn, Brezhnev and Vysotsky) has been rendered archaic without any judgement as to good and evil, victory or defeat.

Solzhenitsyn and Vysotsky, however, are not exceptions in the process of dismantling creator cults;<sup>5</sup> it would be more accurate to see their current status within Soviet society as representative of all such cults. Their books lie side-by-side on the bookstands and in the kiosks with collections by Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam, Pasternak, and Nabokov.

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<sup>5</sup> Even the two most recent 'creator cults' have already fallen apart: the counter-cultural cult surrounding Viktor Tsoi, lead-singer of the rock group 'Kino' and star of Rashid Nugmanov's film *The Noodle* (1988), seems to have died with him in a car accident on 15 August 1990; and the high-cultural cult of deceased filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, organized by the very same cultural administrators who persecuted and denounced him during his lifetime, found only brief support from the viewing public, filmmakers, and the new generation of cultural administrators.

And there is as little consumer demand for them. While collections of works by these sacred cows of Russian literature were still obtainable during the summer of 1990 only through personal contacts (that is, for list price under the counter at state stores) or by purchase on the black market (for between ten and fifteen '*nominaly*'—that is, for ten to fifteen times the list price), then by the summer of 1991 they were available at most of the bookstands and kiosks for a mark-up of only five to seven '*nominaly*'.

This dramatic drop in demand—and price—has been accompanied by an equally dramatic change in the venue for the books' distribution, now that the major black market for books, located in Moscow on Kuznetsky Bridge and operating on weekends, has virtually disappeared. Or more accurately, the *centralized* black market has disappeared; the current grey market consists precisely of these very same bookstands and kiosks, located on just about every street and working every day.

The decentralization of Kuznetsky Bridge is merely a geographic manifestation of the decapitalization of culture. Two other kinds of decentralization are also evident within the bookselling industry: first, the fragmentation of genres, a topic to which we shall return later; second, the growing distinction between the expanded range of 'urban-survival manuals'—karate, sexual disfunction, business financing, herbal remedies, video digests, horoscopes, computer programming, carpentry, dream charts and American management—and the more lucrative aspect of the black market, namely erotica. By this term, of course, we also mean pornography, since, unless the latter is confused with the former in the Soviet Union, it has no opportunity to be sold legally at all. The relegation of erotica to special 'erogenous zones', appropriately distanced from 'establishments of public education, culture or collective rest', is to be determined, regulated and licensed by the district (*raionnyi*) administration, while fines for the violation of established ordinances will be levied by the Moscow City Council.<sup>66</sup> Thus the decapitalization of culture is simultaneously an aesthetic, economic and juridical process: as the state retreats from the practice of shooting its poets and turns instead to levying fines for unzoned erotica, it simultaneously turns its attention away from high culture to low.

A further indication that the 'creator cults' are disintegrating in the absence of consumer interest is the present state of annually scheduled 'Readings' (*chitaniya*). If even two years ago it was impossible to obtain an admittance ticket to any of the unadvertised but standing-room-only scholarly conferences devoted to one of the sacred cows (the Akhmatova Readings, the Mandel'shtam Readings, the Nabokov Readings) without expending a considerable amount of time and personal pull, then already last year these conferences began to take place in halls that were less than half full.<sup>67</sup> In effect, the process of

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<sup>66</sup> *Moskovskie novosti*, 26 May 1991.

<sup>67</sup> The *Nabokovskie chitaniya* held in 1990 at the Gorky Institute for World Literature were very sparsely attended, even though the first such conference—held in the same



dismantling creator cults is merely one aspect of a larger—and infinitely more significant—social process that is occurring in the Soviet Union: the wholesale devaluation of all received culture.

The fate of creator cults cannot be separated from two other developments in the devaluation process: the de-fetishizing of cultural production and the de-elitising of cultural consumption. Until recently, four specific periods of twentieth-century Russo-Soviet culture have dominated the official and unofficial marketplaces: the literature and philosophy of the Silver Age; the literature and literary politics of the 1920s; the essays and fiction of the Thaw; and the 'other literature', émigré literature and counter-culture of post-1975.<sup>16</sup> In the contemporary cultural marketplace, each of these periods is passing through a kind of cultural bankruptcy.

### De-fetishizing Cultural Production

In addition to issuing large print-runs of collections of Akhmatova, Mandel'shtam, Nabokov, and Pasternak, Soviet publishing houses—state-run, joint ventures and cooperatives—have published large printings of most of the writers of the Silver Age: Nikolai Gumilev's and Mikhail Kuzmin's poetry, Andrei Belyi's memoirs, philosophical essays by Dmitrii Merezhkovsky and Vasilii Rozanov, and so on. While this fact has been frequently celebrated in literary newspapers and journals, cultural consumers have remained indifferent. If only two years ago any of these books—even in massive print-runs of several hundred thousand copies and price mark-ups of a thousand per cent or more—would have been snapped up by consumers in the existing marketplace, then today these same books—even in modest print-runs of twenty thousand copies—continue to be available almost everywhere at a minimal mark-up for state-published books or at list price for joint-venture and cooperative books.

In similar fashion, the essays and fiction of the Thaw—most of them not republished after the onset of the Stagnation period, and their absence lamented for two decades—have failed to find a new audience in the contemporary cultural marketplace. Indeed, the three volumes issued so far of a four-volume anthology of all the essential texts of the Thaw—and containing excellent discussions of the literature and cultural politics of the period, as well as an extensive

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<sup>17</sup> (cont.)

hall in 1989—was jammed to capacity. A later conference, the *Bulgakovskie chteniya*, occurred on 13–14 May 1991 and the hall at the Gorky Institute was two-thirds empty.

<sup>18</sup> The term 'other literature'—*drugaya literatura*—was introduced by the critic Sergei Chuprinin in his essay 'Predvestie. Zamečki o zhurnal'noi proze 1988 goda', *Znamya* 1, 1989, pp. 210–24. According to Chuprinin, this 'other literature' differs from mainstream literature (in which 'social-civil and frequently ideological notes are clearly expressed') by its completely 'other' problematic, moral accentuation and artistic language' (p. 222). This term, including as it does works by Liudmila Petrushevskaia, Tat'yana Tolstaya, Venedikt Erofeev and Viktor Erofeev, Valeriya Narbukova, Evgenii Popov, does not refer to a formally integrated body of writing. Instead, Chuprinin's definition points to the uniformly unpublishable status of this writing, given the literary politics of the Stagnation period, and finds the reasons for this in the oppositional socio-aesthetic (rather than explicitly political) criteria present in each work.

chronological description of the specific years covered by each volume—continue to lie in huge piles in all of the bookshops.<sup>19</sup> Publishing houses have already given up on the literature of the Thaw as a cultural commodity: none of the major novels of the period, including Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not By Bread Alone* (1956), have been reissued in substantial print-runs, and plans to publish a second issue of the Thaw anthology *Pages from Tarusa* have been dropped.<sup>20</sup> As writer and critic Viktor Erofeev has remarked, despite the earnest liberalism of the Thaw writers, the contemporary Soviet reading public is put off by their 'hypermoralizing, the disease of maximal moral pressure on the reader'.<sup>21</sup>

By comparison with the literature of the Thaw, the literature and literary politics of the 1920s provided Soviet journals and publishing houses with a substantial market between 1987 and 1989. The (re)publication of works by 'suppressed authors', such as Isak Babel, Boris Pil'nyak, Andrei Platonov and Yevgeny Zamyatin during these years may, in fact, have been the 'last hurrah' of elitist culture in the Soviet Union. For already by 1990, works by the writers of the 1920s and critical studies of the cultural politics of the period began to take up space on the bookstands and in the bookshops respectively.<sup>22</sup> Even enrolment in university seminars devoted to the literature and cultural politics of the 1920s has dropped dramatically since this period lost its aura of official disapproval.<sup>23</sup> In the contemporary cultural marketplace, the pluralism (actual or imagined) of the 1920s has proven to be as irrelevant a cultural commodity as the hegemony (actual or imagined) associated with the imposition of Socialist Realism in 1934.

Finally, this same pattern of cultural bankruptcy can be discerned in the fourth period that has dominated the cultural marketplace in the Soviet Union: 'other literature', émigré literature and counter-culture. Nabokov's novels, together with works by M. Ageev, Vasilii Aksenov, Iosif Brodsky, Sasha Sokolov, Vladimir Voinovich and Aleksandr Zinov'ev are sold at many of the kiosks and bookstands throughout Moscow.<sup>24</sup> Though somewhat more difficult to locate, works by

<sup>19</sup> *Ostapel'* 1953–1956. *Strany russkoi sovetskoi literatury*, Moskovskii rabochii, Moscow 1989; *Ostapel'* 1957–1959, 1990; *Ostapel'* 1960–1962, 1990. All have been compiled by Chuprinin, who has also written the concluding 'Khronika vazhneishikh sobytii' for each volume.

<sup>20</sup> See 'Makulakul' tura', pp. 91–2.

<sup>21</sup> 'Pominki po sovetskoi literature', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 4 July 1990.

<sup>22</sup> Galina Belaya, whose earlier anthologies of literary criticism from the 1920s and studies of the cultural politics of the period were snapped up by avid readers before they reached the bookshops, most recently published an excellent examination of the 1920s Marxist literary association 'Pereval': *Desi Khibet 20-let godov*, Sovetskii pisatel', Moscow 1989. This study, too, is still available in most Moscow bookshops.

<sup>23</sup> See the interview with Belaya, 'Zatonuvshaya Atlantida' in *Zatonuvshaya Atlantida*, Biblioteka 'Ogonek' 14, Moscow 1991, pp. 11–12.

<sup>24</sup> Ageev, *Roman s hobbitom*, Khudozhestvennaya literatura, Moscow 1990; Aksenov, *Onen Krym*, 'Ogonek'–'Variant' (British–Soviet publisher), Moscow 1990 and *Ozobog*, 'Ogonek'–'Variant', Moscow 1990; Brodsky, *Naxidam*, 'Smart' (Finnish–Soviet publisher), Leningrad 1990; *Osmis krih justruba*, IMA Press, Leningrad 1990; and *Sizibet-vormiya*, 'Aleksandra'–'Besti Raamar', Tallin 1991; Sokolov, *Macheta soboloi i volkovi* and *Sibola dlya darabov*, 'Ogonek'–'Variant', Moscow 1990; Voinovich, *Maikha* 2042, Vysa

members of the 'other literature' and the counter-culture—metamorphorists, Conceptualists, new Leningrad wave, and so forth—are also available in a variety of almanacs, new journals and separate publications.<sup>25</sup>

What is striking to the observer is not what is available, but rather those publications that have been postponed or even (possibly) cancelled. Foremost among these are a number of publications that in 1990 became the most important forums for new writing by representatives of the 'other literature' and the counter-culture: the second issues of the almanacs *Vest'* (News) (rescheduled for July 1991 by its Danish-Soviet publisher) and *Zerkalo* (Mirrors) (indefinitely postponed by Vsyā Moskvā); the cancellation (at least temporarily) of the almanac *Gondarsna* by Vsyā Moskvā; and the failure of the Yugoslav-Soviet publisher Interbuk to issue the titles it advertised in early 1990 for two of its series, 'The Silver Age' and 'Contemporary Soviet Poetry and Prose'.<sup>26</sup>

While it is possible that some of these publications have been delayed or cancelled due to the acute and genuine shortage of paper that has affected the entire publishing industry in the Soviet Union,<sup>27</sup> it is also incontestable that the market for printed material has been oversaturated and that prices—official and grey-market—are falling precisely at the time when the cost of paper has shot up. The laws of the emerging marketplace are having a devastating impact on Soviet publishing: while it is now certain that the cost of paper will continue to increase still further for the immediate future, there is no longer any

<sup>24</sup> (cont.)

Moskva (German-Soviet publisher), Moscow 1990; Zinov'ev, *Zhiznnyshchikovy*, two volumes, Plk, Moscow 1990.

<sup>25</sup> Among the new almanacs that carry selections from the 'other literature', émigré literature and counter-culture are *Kamot voka* (Moscow 1991); *Selo* (the first issue was published in Moscow under the sponsorship of the Union of Theatre Workers, 1990, the second by 'Book Chamber International' (British-Soviet publisher, 1991); a collection from various issues of the unofficial journal *Tre't'ya modernizatsiya*, *Assotsiatsiya 'Novaya literatura'*, Leningrad 1991; *Vestnik novoi literatury*, *Assotsiatsiya 'Novaya literatura'*, Leningrad 1990 and 1991. New journals that carry many of the same contributors include *Evropa + Amerika* and *Strannik*. Individual volumes have been published by Yurii Kaminsky, *Eti noch', Prometei*, Moscow 1990; Igor' Kholin, *Zhizn' baraba*, Prometei, Moscow 1989; Yurii Kublanovskiy, *Ostish*, Prometei, Moscow 1990; Boris Kudryakov, *Rybnika smysla*, *Assotsiatsiya 'Novaya literatura'*, Leningrad 1990; Inna Lisnyanskaya, *Stupeni. Nakhoditsya otlyublyayushchego*, Prometei, Moscow 1990; Vsevolod Nekrasov, *Stikhi iz zhurnalov*, Prometei, Moscow 1989; Elena Shvarts, *Stikhi*, *Assotsiatsiya 'Novaya literatura'*, Leningrad 1990; V. Tikhomirov, *Zeleno na voinu*, *Assotsiatsiya 'Novaya literatura'*, Leningrad 1991.

<sup>26</sup> Interbuk has published only one title in the latter series, Venedikt Erofeev's *Moskva-Petushki*, Moscow 1990. Among the books the company advertised but has not published in the series are new collections by Oleg Chukhontsev, Viktor Erofeev, Sergei Kaledin, Petr Mamonov, Petrushevskaya, Dmitrii Prigov, and Tolstaya. Similarly, Vsyā Moskvā has published only two of the books it advertised in 1990: Viktor Erofeev's *Russkiye krassavitsy* and Vyacheslav P'etsukh's *Rossmot*. In addition to cancelling or postponing a number of almanacs, Vsyā Moskvā has failed to publish promised works by Leonid Borodin, Oleg Ermakov, Evgenii Popov and Viktoriya Tokareva.

<sup>27</sup> See Scott B. Rightetti, 'The Soviet Paper Chase: Newsprint Crisis Imperils Glasnost', Research Memorandum, Office of Research, United States Information Agency, 29 April 1991.

certainty that the print-run for any publication will be sold out overnight (or even half of it sold out in a month). Publishers' overheads, as well as the need to carry the financial burden of a backlist—truly revolutionary developments in the world of Soviet publishing—are ineluctably changing the entire profile and structure of the Soviet publishing industry, official as well as joint-venture and cooperative.

There is yet another indication that the 'other literature' and counter-culture have lost their mass appeal among cultural consumers. In the late 1980s, readings of prose and poetry—even solo readings—by representatives of these two groups were guaranteed a standing-room-only audience, despite the absence of any advertising or the fact that they took place in non-literary establishments (the House of Medical Workers, the House of Architects, and so on). Yet by 1991, when two *advertised* evenings of avant-garde poetry were held in the prestigious Oval Hall of the Library of International Literature and featured virtually every major poet of the Soviet counter-culture, attendance for *each* of the readings was fewer than fifty people.<sup>28</sup>

The dismantling of creator cults and the de-fetishizing of cultural production in the Soviet Union are already forcing a radical reorganization of priorities within the culture industry. Yet these two aspects of the contemporary cultural process are dialectically intertwined and interdetermined by a third aspect: the de-elitizing of cultural consumption. While it is highly probable that the Soviet populace continues to be one of the most literate reading publics in the world, it should already be clear that *what* that populace is reading has changed significantly in the last few years.

### The De-elitizing of Cultural Consumption

The removal of authoritarian controls over the publishing industry, the elimination of massive subsidies to the state-run publishing houses, the imposition of cost-accountability and self-financing principles, and the (at least occasional) encouragement extended to new publishing enterprises, have transferred unprecedented economic power to cultural consumers. This, in turn, has precipitated an almost frantic pursuit of new consumers by the entire culture industry.<sup>29</sup> In publishing, this pursuit has manifested itself in the emergence of four new 'literary' modes that now collectively dominate the marketplace of the printed word: detective fiction, instructional material for nascent businessmen, manuals for the physical and psychic arts, and the entire range of erotica.

During the early years of glasnost and perestroika it was not difficult to predict that detective fiction would rapidly expand its share of the

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<sup>28</sup> The readings were the second part of a German-Soviet 'Festival of Avant-Garde Poetry' ('Tut i tam/Hier und dort'), sponsored in Moscow by the Goethe House on 20–21 May 1991. Among the Soviet poets included in the programme were Kholin, Viktor Krivulin, Andrei Monastyrsky, Vs. Nekrasov, Prigov and Lev Rubinshtein. The first part of the festival was held in Essen on 8–10 December 1989; see *Tut i tam. Hier und dort. Russische und deutschsprachige Poesie*, Essen 1990.

<sup>29</sup> See 'Makelshai' *tera* 86.

market once the obstacles inherited from the Scagnation era were removed. Even under Brezhnev, the state publishing houses printed a steady (though by no means sufficient) supply of highly selective translations of detective stories and novels, usually issued in a generic series ('Foreign Detective Stories') and with generic titles: *American Detective Stories*, *Japanese Detective Stories*, *Italian Detective Stories*, and so on. At the same time, these publishers also released a number of Russian-language novels in related fields—procedurals (notably, by Arkadii and Georgii Vainer) and espionage novels (Julian Semenov)—since the socioeconomic structure of socialist society precluded the existence of (or the need for) private and capitalistic detectives.

What was impossible to foresee in those earlier years was the extent of the flood that would be unleashed on Soviet society once the obstacles were removed. Between the summers of 1990 and 1991—that is, at the height of the publishing crisis caused by the paper shortage—many hundreds of detective titles were printed and thrown onto the market for prices that ranged from one to fifteen roubles. Dozens of novels by James Hadley Chase (seemingly the most popular author among Soviet readers at this time) and Agatha Christie have appeared, as well as representative samplings of novels by Raymond Chandler, Ian Fleming, Frederick Forsyth, Dick Francis, Robert Ludlum, Ross Macdonald, Georges Simenon, and others. Because most of these publications consistently violate the international copyright laws (unauthorized translations, the absence of royalties, and so forth) a single novel can appear under different titles and in multiple translations. And there is no indication that this particular market has begun to be oversaturated. Indeed, many of the fledgling cooperative and joint-venture publishers successfully continue to finance and expand their soft-currency operations on the profitable craze for detective fiction.

Except for some of the books—again, procedural/espionage novels by already established Soviet authors—published under Semenov's imprint,<sup>30</sup> the most striking feature of this detective flood is the absence so far of a new generation of Russian-language writers. The domestic contribution to the detective fiction currently available for sale in Moscow is framed by its 'otherness': on the one extreme is the reprint of Roman Antropov's (Roman Dobryi) pre-Soviet 'chapbooks' on the cases of Ivan Putilin';<sup>31</sup> on the other is the publication of émigré writers, Fridrikh Neznanskii and Eduard Topol's, detective novel, *Brezhnev's Journalist, or Deadly Games*.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, despite the undisputed profitability of detective fiction, Soviet publishers seem to be reluctant to risk marketing Russian written material, preferring (at best) to include these aberrations among a collection of putative translations.<sup>33</sup>

Publishing has clearly lost its former professional identity as the

<sup>30</sup> Semenov established one of the first joint-venture (French-Soviet) publishing houses, DDM, in Moscow in 1988. Not surprisingly, the first novel published was Semenov's *Reporter* (1988).

<sup>31</sup> See the ten 'chapbooks' in the series *Gosti russkogo lyika I.D. Putilin's*. *Russkoye o ego polbozhdennyyakh*, Sirin (German-Russian publisher) 1990-91.

<sup>32</sup> Sirin, Moscow 1990. The novel was initially published in Frankfurt in 1981 and an English translation, *Deadly Games*, appeared in 1983 (London and New York).

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, *Pe shoda zmei*, Vsesya Moskva, Moscow 1990.

purveyor of Enlightenment; its new identity is defined as 'business' pure and simple. Equally clearly, this change in identity is not limited to the publishing industry. Despite the government's erratic policies concerning the transition to a market economy, substantial sectors of the public sphere of production—and the entire private sphere—are already operating within the capitalist system ruled by 'cost', 'overhead' and 'profit margins'. It should therefore come as no surprise that handbooks describing Western (in particular, American) business structures, procedures and strategies are beginning to emerge as a kind of detective fiction for serious readers. While many of these publications are translated from other languages,<sup>34</sup> almost as many are written in Russian by Soviets who (allegedly) have had some experience of Western business.<sup>35</sup>

If the undisputed bestseller of 1990 and 1991 continues to be Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936), which has appeared in a number of different editions, then its 'theoretical' primacy is now being challenged by several 'practical' autobiographies by American industrial tycoons (Henry Ford, *My Life and Work* [1922]) and corporate CEOs (Lee Iacocca's *Iacocca, An Autobiography* [1984]). The most recent competitor in the business-book trade is Ludwig Erhard's *Wobland für Alle* (1956) (English translation: *Prosperity Through Competition*, [1958]), the cornerstone text of the so-called 'German economic miracle' of postwar industrial redevelopment.<sup>36</sup> Cultural perestroika has become an integral—if not entirely official—part of the attempts to implement economic perestroika.

The third category of new publications in the Soviet Union consists of works that extend through the entire range of physical and psychic arts: from 'how-to' brochures on self-defence<sup>37</sup> to 'do-it-yourself' pamphlets on folk cures and holistic medicine; from encyclopedias of sexuality and childbirth<sup>38</sup> to manuals on developing extrasensory abilities and 'confessions' by the leading psychics; from gastronomy to astrology.<sup>39</sup> Considering that both the material body and the non-

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the translation of C. Jackson Grayson, Jr. and Carla O'Dell, *American Business: A Two-Minute Warning*, (New York 1988): *Amerikanskii menedzhment na porog XXI veka*, trans. L.S. Oleinik and S.P. Semetsov, Moscow 1991.

<sup>35</sup> See, among others, P.S. Zav'yalov and V.E. Demidov, *Formula uspeha: marketing*, Moscow 1988; S. Zhiznin and V. Krupnov, *Kak stat' biznesmenom*, 'Predprinimatel', Minsk 1990.

<sup>36</sup> *Blagoslovennoe dlya vsekh*, no translator indicated, Nachals-Press, Moscow 1991.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, *80 sposobov kak ne stat' zberetoi prestuplenniya: karate, dzhudo, bittsu, karate, kendo* (no indication of author, place or date of publication; printed by 'Penzenskaya pravda').

<sup>38</sup> Dr Christiane Verdoux et al., *Entsiklopediya seksua'noi zhizni. Fiziologiya i psikhologiya*, trans. T. Bol'shakova, 'Dom', Moscow 1990.

<sup>39</sup> This last pairing contains the most curious contradiction: both gastronomy and astrology in the Soviet Union are frozen in time. The overwhelming majority of cookbooks that have entered the marketplace are republications of standard works of a time long past—late nineteenth and early twentieth century. All contain ingredients that several generations of Soviet citizens have never seen. Similarly, the astrological charts and dream guides—*Million snov*, 1901, (reprint: Kniga-Printshop [Canadian-Soviet publisher], Moscow 1990)—are organized as historical invariants: the birth sign or dream vision is never subject to time or context. In a peculiar twist to Gertrude Stein, a Virgin is a Virgin is a Virgin.

material psyche were equally forbidden pleasure zones for half a century in Soviet culture, it was only to be expected that they would be joyously repossessed once the cultural landscape—and the anatomical one—was more accurately charted.

The resurgence of various cultural forms of mysticism and spiritualism also belongs to this category of new publications. The rejection by the populace of the entire legacy of materialist philosophy (in particular, Marxism–Leninism) has led to the proliferation of books by idealist, existential and religious writers.<sup>40</sup> From this point of view, most striking to a bystander is the absence in the marketplace of books published by the presses of the Russian Orthodox Church. All of the Bibles and New Testaments for sale in the kiosks and at the bookstands have been printed either by cooperative or joint-venture publishers, or have been imported. Even the books by twentieth-century Russian Orthodox theologians, which are in high demand and available only with difficulty on the open market, are issued by state-run publishing houses.<sup>41</sup> By refusing—even symbolically—to enter the marketplace of the printed word, the Church has ceded its spiritual role to the power of the flesh.

### Erotica as Guerrilla Commodity

In this regard, the publication in early 1990 of Villi Konn's *Adventures of a Cosmic Prostitute*<sup>42</sup> either offended or amused most customers at the kiosks where it appeared for sale. Despite the suggestive title and cover, the story can only marginally be considered a work of erotic literature. The erotic element consists of three (brief and generic) descriptions of a naked woman-cockroach and two references to the sounds of a condom being removed. Instead, the story is a kind of *borsbcb* of forbidden pulp fiction: chunks of science fiction, slices of the hard-boiled detective, bits of the thriller, and just a hint of sex. Even this hint, however, was enough to distinguish *Adventures of a Cosmic Prostitute* from the other first-generation attempts to break the taboo on the printing of sexually explicit material. Most of the other 'scandalous' works of this generation—for example, reprints of Mariya Evgen'eva's *Lovers of Catherine the Great* or S. Gorskoi's *Wives of Ivan the Terrible*<sup>43</sup>—were simply fictionalized and highly sanitized stories of the sexual appetites of in/famous rulers.

<sup>40</sup> See especially the 'literary-artistic, historico-cultural' almanac *Laterna Magica* Prometei, Moscow 1990, which contains examples of all of these types of writing.

<sup>41</sup> See Father Pavel Florensky, *Stup i isverzhdeniia istiny* (two volumes) and *U vodorazdelov mysl*, Pravda, Moscow 1990.

<sup>42</sup> *Pokhozhdeniya kosmicheskoi proustutki*, Vsy Moskv, Moscow 1990. While everyone in the Moscow book trade recognized that 'Villi Konn' was a pseudonym—the obviously foreign name signalling to readers that the work was a translation of some salaciously decadent Western erotica—the identity of 'Konn' was a closely guarded secret even in the editorial offices of Vsy Moskv. It is now rumoured that 'Konn' is a collective pseudonym for a group of Tass employees (*Kuizbas obscenii*, 17 May 1991). This would place *Pokhozhdeniia* in the same tradition as Penelope Ashe's (a collective pseudonym for *Newday* reporters) *Naked Came the Stranger* (1969); see Mike McGrady, *Stranger than Naked; or How to Write Dirty Books for Fun and Profit*, New York 1970.

<sup>43</sup> *Lisbenniki Ekhetarii*, Volia, Moscow, no date; *Zheny Iosana Gruzyns*, Delo, Moscow 1912, reprinted Dinamik-nauka, Moscow 1990.

By late 1990, the second generation of erotic literature appeared in the Soviet Union. The works of this generation have no precedent in the history of Russian-language literature, not even in the 'notorious' poetry of Ivan Barkov or the folk stories collected in *Russia's Secret Fairy Tales* (*Russkii zavetnye skazki*). Even their titles make it clear that these new books are the soulmates of the best tradition of American drugstore or 'XXX-shop' porno-novels: *The Devil's 'SEX' Cards*, *California Vacation*, *The Bachelor*, *Passion Hotel*, *Adventures in Moonlight Hotel*, *Gender Comings*, *Swedish Threesome*, *Memoirs of a Young Woman*.<sup>44</sup> These novels are equally fearless in their graphic cataloguings of close encounters of every kind (oral sex, anal sex, multiple-orifice sex, multiple-partner sex, homosexual sex, and even missionary sex) and in their allergic avoidance of every narrative convention associated with 'realism' (authorship, characterization, description, development, temporality, causality, consistency). More interesting, however, is their fearlessness concerning their status as cultural commodities.

These novels are essentially guerrilla commodities. Social indignation and pressure from conservative cultural workers forced these novels out of the kiosks and onto the streets,<sup>45</sup> where they have been unable to find a haven even on the outdoor bookstands in the city. Instead, these books are now sold in many of the underground passageways and metro entrances; they are spread out on a piece of cloth laid on the ground. This enables the sellers to gather them into a bundle and move away at the first appearance of either the militia or offended citizens, who constitute a kind of volunteer morality police.

But these books are guerrilla commodities not merely in terms of their distribution and marketing; they are also guerrilla commodities in their reproduction and packaging. Since none of the central presses dare to print them, most of these books are simply 'printed' on the typewriter—a revenge on the elite cultural *semizdat* of bygone years—reduced, photocopied and stapled. While it appears that publishers of erotic literature have at least some access to printing presses in the Baltic republics, where many of these books originate, once in Moscow they, too, are reproduced on photocopying machines. As a result, the market for erotic literature does not distinguish between the fetishized category of 'original' (complete with colour-printed cover) and the degraded category of 'copy' (black-and-white reproduction with poor resolution); both objects—even when sold side-by-side—have the same price (four roubles for a sixteen-page story, fifteen to twenty roubles for a fifty to eighty page novel). Even these prices, however, actually mock all other cultural commodities. While all

<sup>44</sup> As a rule, these publications carry a minimum of bibliographic information, frequently dispensing with the pretence of indicating a fictive author. The following information can be provided for the titles listed: *Devil's 'SEX' cards*, Larvia; *Rodovoe slovo*, Sergei Khaliy; *'Euboe'—Sergei*, Tallinn; *Shvedskaya trushka* (O. Konner, Eroticheskaya literatura, Moscow 1991); *Vospominaniya molodoi zhenitsy* ('New-Sex Hit', Riga).

<sup>45</sup> In December 1990, yielding to pressure from cultural conservatives, Gorbachev ordered the creation of an anti-pornography commission. The commission, chaired by USSR Minister of Culture, Nikolai Gubenko, was charged with studying the struggle against pornography and suggesting steps to preserve public morals (*Report on the USSR*, 14 December 1990, p. 34).



other publications in the Soviet Union—state, cooperative or joint-venture—carry a printed 'list-price' (honoured or not), these guerrilla commodities joyously unmask the gap between list price and asking price. Printed on all of them are the words 'price negotiable' ('*tsena po dogovornosti*').

Until it is allowed by the government to come out of the gutter and back onto the street, erotic literature will continue to be a guerrilla commodity and its 'look' will continue to be colourless. Certain steps are already being taken to legitimize the status of erotic literature. The first (1991) issue of the 'independent almanac' *End of the Century* (*Konets veka*) carries an announcement on its back cover that the editors have signed an agreement with émigré writer Edward Limonov to publish his sexually explicit autobiographical novel, *It's Me, Eddis!*, sometime in the near future. In April 1991 the first glossy, colour, fully illustrated 'Russian magazine for men'—*Andrii*—appeared in many Moscow kiosks; the issue costs just under ten roubles and is anatomically incorrect only in the immediate vicinity of the female genitalia.<sup>46</sup> Finally, as we mentioned earlier, in May 1991 the executive committee of the Moscow City Council voted 'to follow the example of civilized countries' by tolerating adult-material shops in designated areas of most neighbourhoods. After 14 June 1991, violators of this zoning ordinance will no longer face criminal prosecution, a procedure requiring substantial capital expenditure by municipal authorities. Instead, violators will be subject to fines, thereby deflecting a portion of profits from the sale of erotica back into the municipal budget.<sup>47</sup>

### The Reduction of Sovereignty

The sign of the failing penis is the emblematic mark of postmodern subjectivity.

Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, *The Hysterical Male*

The success of perestroika (1985–90) as the Communist Party's final five-year plan, lay in the fact that its failure could be publicly discussed at the moment of its occurrence. The internal contradictions of perestroika, which eventually brought about its demise, were evident from the very outset: its standard-bearers were unrealistic yet passionately committed to the truth, idealistic yet obsessed with objectivity, totalitarian in their liberationist philosophy, enraptured with their own Radiant Future (*svetloe budushchee*)—when they would finally emerge victorious from dismantling the disconfirmed Radiant Future of their predecessors.

Perestroika began when those living in the present could no longer afford the price of the old rosy future; like apostate Ivan Karamazovs, they tried to return their tickets of admission. The rosy future of Communism proved to be not only too expensive but also unappealing, as its hostage-consumers contemplated alternative futures, whether they were 'affordable' (a word rapidly gaining currency) or not.

<sup>46</sup> *Andrii*, Moscow 1991.

<sup>47</sup> See *Moskovskoe novosti*, 26 May 1991. This decision is fairly similar to the recommendations made by Gubenko one week after he was appointed chairman of the state anti-pornography commission (*Report on the USSR*, 21 December 1990, p. 36).

Perestroika ended when the strict triangular model of social organization, weakened first by the revocation of Article Six, then further by the ongoing negotiations concerning the reconfiguration of the Union itself, ceased to be the single, dominant structure for effecting (or preventing) change. Perestroika was not in this sense a turning away from totalitarianism; it was totalitarianism's turning away from itself toward an eastern network of confederated republics, mirroring in some respects the confederative process of its Western European neighbours.

Thus, the word 'sovereignty'—that is to say, the right to use the word 'sovereign', whatever meaning can be negotiated for that word at a particular historical moment—becomes an issue just at the time when the Union is recognizing that sovereignty is less vital to its international survival than a convertible rouble, and that the cost of that convertible rouble is the reduction of sovereignty from an internationalist to an interrepublicanist concept.

In the course of this transformation, clearly defined oppositions that stabilized the old, rigid, triangular structure have become destabilized: Communism/democracy, Party/non-Party, hard currency/soft currency, freedom/tyranny, ours/theirs (*nash/no nash*), West Berlin/East Berlin, open shops/closed shops, official culture/unofficial culture, and so forth. This reified thesis–antithesis relationship, presided over by a paralysed Marxist state during the Stagnation period, could not resolve itself in synthesis. It required a total redefinition of relations between mutually exclusive categories, cancelling out previous categories of opposition. Competing categories of discourse—'developed socialism' versus 'stagnation', for example—turned out to be non-oppositional categories as it became possible to say publicly that the economic and social devastation running through all aspects of Soviet society was both developed socialism *and* stagnation, however much the confirmed socialist may have wished it otherwise.

### The Postmodernization of Soviet Culture

Nowhere is this redefinition of binary oppositions more clearly set out than in the postmodernist novella *No Return* by Aleksandr Kabakov, first published in *Art of Cinema* (*Iskusstvo kino*) in June 1989. The chief protagonist, who shuttles between two realized oxymorons—an obsolete present (1988) and a contemporary future (1993)—is accompanied by a woman from Katerinoslav, which is simultaneously the ancient name and the newly restored name for Dnepropetrovsk. Thus, the woman's past is situated in a town for which the newest name is the most ancient name, while the post-revolutionary name is the old name. In forcing the reader to cope with three intertwining planes of time—the ancient city, the Soviet city, and the post-perestroika namesake of antiquity—Kabakov, a self-confessed postmodernist, shatters not only the clear opposition of 'Russian Katerinoslav/Soviet Dnepropetrovsk', but also the 'unquestionable' opposition of space and time: the name of the space—Dnepropetrovsk—inescapably becomes an expression of time.

But this blurring of distinctions between space and time is not simply

a literary device of postmodernism; or rather, the cultural experience of postmodernism does not restrict itself either to this device or to this text. Since 1934, literature in particular and then, by extension, the arts in a broader sense, were required to observe the teleological aesthetics called Socialist Realism. Abram Terts's analysis here, despite its sectarian conclusion, remains as accurate as ever: art was called upon to move toward the Purpose, as indeed was history and most other forms of social activity.

Of course, both art and history, crippled in many ways, were nevertheless allowed, even required, certain avant-garde excesses in the service of the Purpose, as long as they did not engage in any such nonsense as the accurate documentation of reality. Multiple endings for multiple readerships (the self, the censor and the 'actual' reader); Aesopian multivalence; blank pages; conflicting narrative lines; a deliberately distorted mirroring of dates, places and characters; a love of citation (mostly Lenin, come to think of it); the surrealist interpenetration of Beria and Bering Strait; and, in general, a distinctly sutured quality—all of these were constitutive features of a kind of Stalinist Modernism, despite the official, and brutally enforced, opposition to Modernism.

As perestroika returned to history its modest entitlement (namely, the officially sanctioned right to map social reality according to a broader spectrum of methodologies), it likewise returned to art its entitlement (namely, its officially sanctioned right to participate without covert action in the ongoing discussion about a non-teleological aesthetics)—the 'mitosis', if you will, of modernism to postmodernism.

Komar and Melamid, Il'ya Kabakov, Dmitrii Prigov, Lev Rubinshtein, and other Conceptualists are in this respect not so much alternative or parallel cultural figures as they are renegade Socialist Realists, runners in the relay race of history who, grabbing hold of the baton, break into a frenzied cancan. They have been the mediating moment between Socialist Realism as an imposed teleology and postmodernism as one cultural enactment of its demise. Their deliberate celebration of falseness, their presentation of image as image, their merciless reduction of culture, their invocation of sacred texts not as a foundation for authority but for the dechurching of those texts and all other texts, including their own—these traits signal the moment of transition to an aesthetics of postmodernism as one (and only one) of the artistic alternatives to contemporary culture.

One of the earliest moments in this transition to postmodernist culture was the so-called 'Bulldozer Exhibit' of 13 September 1974 in Izmailovo Park, where the KGB used both bulldozers and street-spraying machines to destroy an open-air exhibit of contemporary art. It is worth noting from a distance of nearly two decades that the keepers of tradition in this affair were the artists, content to display their work in customary fashion. Their opposite number, in contrast, staged an innovative event: not so much a 'Bulldozer Exhibit' as a 'Bulldozer Happening', a KGB Conceptualist performance piece, a successful, if somewhat forced, handing over of the baton. In the

almost twenty years since the mandatory baptism of the 'Bulldozer Happening', complete with uniforms and street-spraying machines, an entire generation's terminology, stretching from the 'Iron Curtain' across the entire 'Union of Soviet Socialist Republics', has ceased to serve as a set of geographical coordinates and stands instead for historical ones: 'there was a time when we used the term "Iron Curtain" ...'

This 'postmodernization' of Soviet culture, most evident in the incapacity of older canonical texts, official or oppositional, to provide an authoritative foundation on which to build an argument, a belief system, or any other coherent code, prevents that culture from 'acquiring momentum'—to borrow a term from Jameson's critique of Habermas<sup>48</sup>—on the bones of received knowledge.

Poised above this socio-aesthetic extravaganza is Mikhail Gorbachev, the quintessential postmodernist hero-in-crisis: with his party in ruins and his country in crisis, he is the presiding General Secretary at the historical moment when that very cult is being dismantled—the only political cult figure after Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin and Stalin who must live through both his own dethroning and the dismantling of the throne. This *fin-de-millennium* hysterical male can no longer aspire to being the superfluous hero, the positive hero, the tragic hero, or the anti-hero. He is the non-hero.

This role is most clearly evident in the popular representation of the leader painted on the *matrubki* at Izmailovo. As the gentle, bovine *devitry* (maidens) of the past have been replaced by older, male political leaders, often (though not exclusively) the discarded cult figures of a previous era, the *patrubki* are not represented as analogues of the placid maidens, but precisely as men under stress: screaming monsters with bared teeth, menacing tyrants, military dictators brandishing tanks. Within this range, Gorbachev may be represented as a deranged rock musician with shattered glasses; as a jilted lover, plucking off daisy petals labelled with the republics of a disintegrating Union; as a decapitated head on a dictator's platter.

Nor does he fare any better in the urban *chastushki*, or rhymed couplets: 'The virgins are moening; the woman all cry./We just don't know what to do, when, or why./Michael G. knew then just how to begin./Why can't he get it a bit further in?' Thus does Gorbachev, the lover who fails to love, embody the realized oxymoron characteristic of the postmodern period. The central figure of Soviet decentring and decentralization, the non-heroic hero of perestroika, Gorbachev fails but stays on; his failure is marked not by the implication that the hero resides elsewhere, but by the bankruptcy of heroism in its pure, morally unambiguous and totalitarian incarnation.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> See Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic*, London 1990, p. 241; Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Volume 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston 1984, pp. 356–7.

<sup>49</sup> Among the *patrubki* that have appeared since the putsch of 19–21 August 1991 is a set that represents Yeltsin as the outermost—the largest—doll, enveloping a diminished Gorbachev. The populist impulse expressed in this new ordering of dolls further underscores the post-perestroika ambiguity of Gorbachev as a head of state who simultaneously outranks Yeltsin and is subordinate to him.

The profound changes that are occurring at the end of twentieth-century Russian culture recapitulate in many respects those that occurred three centuries earlier, when such works as 'Savva Grudtsyn', 'Frol Skobelev', 'Shemiakin's Judgment' and 'Story of Grief and Misfortune' laid the foundations of Russian letters: the abandonment of a collective social fate for an individualized, even self-willed, fate; the emerging importance of money as theme, cause and deterrent; moral ambiguity replacing strongly delineated ethical categories of discourse; subversive laughter permitted publicly on the pages of culture; a revelling in the erotic; the lowering of literary forms; a perverse delight in the admixtures of language; the notion that individual wits, resourcefulness and enterprise can affect one's condition.

These similarities do not suggest that Russian culture has moved backwards; though it may suggest that Russia, like the West, is experiencing the end of culture as it has been conceived for three centuries. Regardless of this larger issue, it is indisputable that Russia is reimagining itself as it awakens from the last, rosy dream of perestroika. In so doing, it is also reimagining the West, 'civilized society', as we are now astonishingly called. This 'civilized society', residing somewhere beyond Soviet borders, is marked by the economic status of the US and the high cultural traditions of white colonial Europe. It is not yet relevant to the waking-dreamer of perestroika that 'real, existing capitalism', either in the United States or in post-colonial Europe, looks and acts out of keeping with this apparition. The current stage in our cultural relations is the debunking of that apparition; a society with full larders and revered poets is not only impossible; it is the worst of both possible worlds.

June 1991

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*interview*

Roy Medvedev

## Politics after the Coup

*How would you assess Gorbachev as a historical figure? What were the major turning-points in his policies during the past six years, and were the policies he chose to pursue correct or not?*

In my view it is still too early to make any definitive assessment. As a historian, I have to take a long-term view, and with Gorbachev that is not yet possible. When you make such an assessment, you have to ask: what did the person in question leave behind? We might, for example, take Khrushchev. Although many of Khrushchev's reforms were unsuccessful, nonetheless a great deal of what he did remained. On the other hand, however much Brezhnev wanted to rehabilitate Stalin, and to restore certain of Stalin's policies, he had only limited success.

You can call Gorbachev a great reformer, someone who brought about fundamental changes to the situation in the country and to the world. But we

will only really be able to pronounce judgment on this in another ten or fifteen years. Gorbachev embarked on huge reforms, but he did not have any conscious plan. From the very first, his reforms were badly thought out and quite devoid of effective forecasting. He followed a course that consisted of successive zigzags to the right or left. Many reforms were simply mistaken, and by pursuing them he sharply undermined people's confidence in him. So now, despite the aura of 'Gorbachev the great reformer', despite the fact that he radically transformed our society, the mass of the population has a very low regard for him. Now the last vestiges of support that he had within the Communist Party are gone as well—Gorbachev himself renounced them. Communists now despise him even more than other people.

When Gorbachev took power, our country was in a perilous condition. And when we look around us now, six years after Gorbachev began his reforms, what do we see? We are producing less in quantitative terms, and the quality of our output has not improved. People are working less well than they were before: only a few individual enterprises are working better. The performance of our agriculture has deteriorated; none of this sector's underlying problems have been solved. The Union has fallen apart, split into a series of separate republics, and in many of these a similar process of disintegration is underway. The monetary system is disintegrating, and the rate of inflation is growing. Meanwhile, what has been gained? Now there is at least a certain democracy, freedom of speech and opinion, and of course this is good. But to a significant degree this occurred independently of Gorbachev; the situation in the country became so bad that people simply spoke out, and could not be stopped. He gave people opportunities which they took in ways that surprised and displeased him. Gorbachev introduced certain changes to official ideology, but did not carry them through to their logical conclusions. He proclaimed the advent of 'new thinking', but this was merely a slogan. There was talk of a new concept of socialism, a new approach, but this was not followed up. Electoral processes were established, but Gorbachev himself did not utilize them in a timely fashion, nor create the conditions where his project could benefit from them.

Gorbachev repeatedly initiated drastic changes of direction. In 1985 he began his reforms with an anti-alcoholism campaign. Using forcible and quite undemocratic administrative-command methods, he tried to wean people off vodka. There was also a campaign against smoking. What has come out of all this? Now people are drinking more. But the anti-alcoholism campaign helped bring about the collapse of the financial system, because the government drew a great deal of its revenue from the sale of alcohol, which is a state monopoly. Then in 1986 Gorbachev began a struggle against unearned incomes. It did not last long—about two months. There was supposed to be a campaign against speculators—somebody who obtained a sack of potatoes from his neighbour and sold them at the market would be regarded as a speculator because he sold them for more than he paid his neighbour. The markets stopped working, and the links between the countryside and the towns suffered. Then we saw a turnaround. When it became obvious that the government's policies were arousing



dissatisfaction and that the economic situation was worsening, the law on cooperation was adopted, along with legislation on the independence of enterprises. But these moves were not properly thought through. For this reason the cooperatives, right from the beginning, took on a speculative character and not a productive one; they failed to put significant new quantities of goods on the market. The law on the independence of enterprises was also poorly thought out. We saw the rise of 'collective egoism'; each enterprise thought solely of itself, just as in Yugoslavia. The links between enterprises were broken, and production levels failed to improve.

In the countryside, Gorbachev sought initially to solve the problems through changes to the system of administration of agriculture, just as Khrushchev had done, without understanding that the critical thing was initiative from below, from the peasants themselves. Huge, unwieldy new administrative apparatuses were set up—Agropromsoyuz, Agroprom of the Russian Federation. These colossal administrative structures subsequently collapsed; today nothing remains of them. Tens of thousands of people worked for these organizations, but they hindered the development of agriculture rather than helping it.

The question arose of how to bring about improvements in the quality of Soviet-made goods. A 'State Committee for the Control of the Quality of Production' was set up. As well as the control this exercised over the enterprises, a huge state organization called 'Gospriyomka' ('state acceptance agency') was established. Gospriyomka was supposed to accept the products of the enterprises and to test their quality. A huge new apparatus arose, with thousands of functionaries, but the quality of goods failed to improve. Then this was all abolished, and now we are trying to carry out a transition to the market, so that the market will directly regulate the quantity and quality of goods. But they decided they wanted to carry out this transition fast. Last year they worked out the 'Programme of Five Hundred Days'—the period in which we were to make the transition to the market. But you don't need me to convince you that making a transition to the market in the space of five hundred days was impossible. Because in so enormous an economic system as the Soviet Union, based not on the market but on command-administer relations—where there were few banks capable of providing financial services under market conditions, where there were no exchanges, where none of the structures of the market system existed—it doesn't matter what things cost, because the state will cover the losses. But the market system is much more subtle. It demands quite different people, quite different economic structures, quite different relationships between regions, a quite distinct system of relations between enterprises. In the West all this was established over centuries, but we decided to create it in the space of five hundred days. And, of course, it didn't work. So in the Soviet Union today no one lives better than they did ten years ago, if we discount the 2 or 3 per cent of the population who are growing rich on speculation. The workers and peasants, the intelligentsia, army officers, are all much worse off.

Glasnost was an excellent thing, but its effect was to release a flood of

complaints. During the years of Soviet power intense dissatisfaction had built up. The effect of democratization was not to cause people to express their goodwill, their suggestions, their constructive ideas, but rather to show their animosity. Instead of enthusiasm, an enormous negative potential rose to the surface.

So I repeat that historians need to make an assessment of Gorbachev when his epoch comes to an end. I think it is possible that the evaluation we make will be a very harsh one. I wouldn't exclude the possibility that we will decide that Gorbachev was the person who destroyed the country. And here I repeat my conviction that it was possible to carry out reform in a peaceful and consistent fashion. This would not have been so fast, but it would have allowed a steady growth in the economic and political potential of the state. It was possible to work out an intelligently conceived, properly considered plan of reforms that would have brought steady improvements to the situation in the economy, to the situation in politics and ideology, to the situation with regard to the national question. It was necessary to draw up a thoroughly researched programme of perestroika: to map out the methods for moving to a market economy, for introducing independent production, for developing small and middle production as well as large enterprises, for bringing about competition between enterprises, and for putting an end to the system of large monopolies in the economy. It would have been possible to work out such a plan, and to do so within a broadly socialist framework.

If the development of our country had proceeded along these lines, then after six years of perestroika the Soviet Union would have been a much greater economic power. By contrast, our economy is now operating much less effectively than it was six years ago. So you could say that the main stress in my assessment of Gorbachev is negative rather than positive. At earlier stages in the process I was very impressed by Gorbachev, but now I can see that his main role has been to destroy rather than to construct. Clearly the mistakes made by Gorbachev weakened him and made him vulnerable to pressure, both from conservative forces and from the Yeltsin camp. Eventually, as the events of August confirmed, he lost control.

*Where does this leave the left forces here in Russia? What has followed on the dissolution of the CPSU, and what new formations have arisen?*

For us these days the concept of 'left forces' is a very ill-defined one, since everyone is trying to call themselves 'leftists', including people whose real cast of mind is decidedly right wing. I'd like to give an example now of why it's difficult for us to employ the established European concepts of 'right' and 'left'. On the one hand, those who call themselves 'leftists' or 'extreme leftists' include, for example, the 'Unity' group headed by Nina Andreyeva. This group had called for the expulsion of Gorbachev from the party, had declared him an enemy, and were demanding that he be put on trial. These are people who dream of a return to Stalinism. From any healthy political viewpoint, including I think from that of Western European leftists, these are the people who represent the most dogmatically conservative

section of the CPSU. All the same, they consider themselves the most radical and left-wing faction of the party. It should be understood that the concepts of 'radicalism' and of 'the Left' here have undergone a kind of division. For example, everyone recognizes that Pamyat, the antisemitic group that has a great deal of influence in Moscow, Leningrad and Sverdlovsk, represents 'the Right'. Those people are nationalists and chauvinists, and there is a definite categorization for them. But in my view Nina Andreyeva's Unity group, because they are an extremist and intolerant faction, can't be called leftists.

Another significant formation in the Communist Party is the 'Initiative' group. This group arose two years ago; it has called its own congress and has its own leadership. Although more moderate than Unity, it is still a quite rigidly conservative section of the party. An element of the leadership of the Communist Party of Russia gravitated toward this faction—people such as Ziuganov and others. It also had support among members of the Central Committee, of Russian nationalists of the Belov type, and of a few writers such as Valentin Rasputin. These members of the party in my view represented part of the conservative forces within it. To say that someone is 'conservative' has a certain meaning, while to describe them as 'left' or 'right' is to use terms which are already incomprehensible to most Russians. So I personally use the term 'conservative-dogmatist' to describe this section of the party.

The liberals, or democrats, also describe themselves as 'leftists'. They do so in relation to the centrists headed by Gorbachev, or in the recent past by other members of the Politburo, because Gorbachev's position has now changed dramatically. Notwithstanding their self-ascribed radicalism, most of the democrats stand not simply for the rebirth of the market in the Soviet Union, but specifically for the revival of a Western-style capitalist market. For them, the development in Russia of private entrepreneurship, including such open forms as the private ownership of land and the selling of large enterprises to Western business interests, is a very radical proposition, which has, as they put it, a 'revolutionary' character. But from the point of view of orthodox Communism this is a right-wing proposition, amounting to bourgeois counter-revolution. Very large numbers of Communists, not only those like Andreyeva and Ziuganov but also those of a moderate character, are against such proposals. They say: we need the market, but it should be controlled and regulated, a market in which private entrepreneurs, cooperatives, state enterprises and enterprises owned by their labour collectives can all take part. That is, we need a mixed economy, in which the existing large state enterprises would play the principal role. So the democrats, who in fact are calling for capitalism, and who hold up as an example the present-day United States—since Britain is said to be partly a socialist country (Thatcher having failed to push privatization through to the end as was required) and even Sweden is viewed negatively—all offer their advice. In the US, they will tell you, there exists real socialism: they care about the worker, and the worker lives better there than anywhere else. These people have little understanding of Western society, and arguably my own conception lacks clarity too. Nevertheless, I

have more knowledge because my brother lives in the West: he tells me what it's like, and sometimes refutes my mistaken ideas. But the democrats have no idea whatsoever. Their conception of living standards in Western society is formed on the following basis: because the average wage of a Western worker is higher than that of a Soviet worker and because an average wage earner in the West can buy more products than in the USSR, it follows that workers there live better. It therefore follows that society there is closer to socialism than our socialist society, in which workers are exploited not by a private capitalist but by the state. I'm describing this logic in order to illustrate how these people reason.

Some of those loosely referred to as 'the Left' here are people who could be better described as 'neo-Bolshevik' and 'neo-bourgeois' forces. Thus if Gavriil Popov, the mayor of Moscow, says 'a revolution is now occurring, and in a revolution laws no longer have any meaning, so I am not going to abide by any set of laws, either union or republican ones', then we would say that he is acting as a neo-Bolshevik, since this is purely Bolshevik logic. There are no laws; the tsarist laws have been abolished, new laws have not yet been adopted, so one can do whatever one chooses. Therefore Popov can sign a decree to expropriate property belonging, say, to the Academy of the People's Economy; he can occupy part of the buildings of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which according to the courts have still not been taken from the party. He can seize for the use of the mayoralty a large part of the premises of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance, a building which belongs jointly to the countries that used to make up the council. This building was constructed on the basis of contributions by the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Romania and Hungary, and is therefore collective property—each country invested twenty, thirty, in some cases forty, million dollars. But Popov takes this building for the mayoralty, and the Moscow city administration has already taken over the fourth floor. This is straightforward confiscation—it is not his property; but he relocates the city administration there. How should one describe these actions—as 'left'- or 'right'-wing?

Simultaneously, Popov adopts measures to develop private entrepreneurship in Moscow, but very cautiously. Unlike Sobchak, the mayor of Leningrad—now St Petersburg—he has not put shops up for sale in any significant quantity. For the present, shops of no more than 100 square metres in area—small shops—are being sold at auction to private entrepreneurs. The number is not great—it might be 5 or 10 per cent of the shops in Moscow. The large shops remain state owned, since Popov receives a substantial part of the Moscow budget revenues from this source. He has not yet put a substantial quantity of housing on sale, so there is no real market in housing in Moscow yet. Small, distinct groups of apartments have been sold, but this is in the nature of an experiment. Twenty or thirty apartments might be sold in various regions of the city. An auction is organized, and the prices inflate to huge levels. Prices of as much as a million roubles or more are paid for some apartments. The buyers are private individuals or cooperatives, even foreigners. They change dollars or pounds for

roubles; having obtained a million roubles they buy an apartment. This strikes them as cheap, since for a pound sterling you can now obtain more than fifty roubles; so a million roubles is less than twenty thousand pounds. Therefore a foreign business entrepreneur obtains a good four-room apartment in Moscow for twenty thousand pounds, while Popov has a million roubles for the budget. However, it should be stressed that only a very small proportion of the apartments are being put on the market.

Popov is ambitious to make his way in national politics. But in Moscow itself his measures have failed to improve the situation. He may be a brilliant economist but after nearly two years of his administration life for the ordinary Muscovite is worse than before. We now find we are worse off than people in other cities, which was never previously the case. Personally I have more respect for Sobchak than for Popov, though some of the same failings can be detected in him too. He travels a lot, neglecting the city he is responsible for, and there is a certain authoritarian strain in his approach to politics, though this is less pronounced than in the case of Popov.

The democrats, then, are very diverse; one should not think of them as a united bloc. There are something like forty-one different parties now, and it's difficult for us to orient ourselves, to know which of them are right wing and which left.

Let us now consider the Communists, assuming that one counts them as leftists. They are also now divided. Apart from the Unity and Initiative groups, there are several others that want to revive the Communist Party on a new basis. I'm not talking here about those who want to revive the party in the form it had earlier, though there are such people—they want to retain its former structures, obtain a decision from the prosecutor's office to halt the judicial investigation, and then to secure a court decision restoring the old party, with the previous leadership, apparatus and property. This is probably an unrealistic hope, though we can't tell how things will unfold. But there are other groups. For example, there is the so-called 'Marxist Platform'. This has a membership made up principally of teaching staff of the higher educational institutions and party schools. In the Soviet Union these latter were, of course, well developed. Each province had its provincial party school, and there were also republican and zonal schools. The highest school was the Academy of Social Sciences. Of course, these are only some of the party's teaching institutions. In addition, every higher educational institution, whether concerned with the oil industry, metallurgy or medicine, had a chair of social sciences which taught Marxism-Leninism. So a huge number of people, as many as a million of them, were engaged in teaching this official ideology of 'scientific' socialism—it had, needless to say, long ceased to be truly scientific. I am myself an adherent of scientific socialism, but I don't consider that what these people taught was socialism in the real sense. Nevertheless, there existed a huge mass of people whose profession was teaching and research work in the field of Marxism, and it was these people who made up the Marxist Platform. This was, of course, the party intelligentsia, and it suffered from

orthodoxy. It was incapable of reviving the party because it lacked ties to the working class and peasantry. (The party in its final period had about fifteen million members: of these about half a million were workers in the party apparatus, that is, leaders on various levels; about a million were teaching staff, the intelligentsia; the rest were workers in the factories and on the farms, in offices and so on.) The Marxist Platform wasn't as conservative as other currents. In its own way it wanted renewal, but only within narrow limits. Even the name 'Marxist Platform' indicates that they had no wish to depart too far from Marx in order to develop scientific socialism on the basis of the concepts of the late twentieth century, when social reality was strikingly different from what it had been a hundred and fifty years earlier. The working class is different now, as are the economy, capitalism, socialism, and the general world situation. Many of Marx's predictions have not materialized, including in the field of the economy, and the people in the Marxist Platform are still unwilling to recognize this.

There is also a group that wants to revive the party on the basis of the programme adopted in July—to renew it as a party of the democratic left, resembling the former Italian Communist Party. These people want a party that is not orthodox, a party open to free discussion, a party in which views can be espoused and groupings formed freely. This would be a party of the socialist choice, but a non-dogmatic organization that did not define in rigid terms what socialism was to be like. Later on today there is to be a presentation to begin the process of founding such a party. People will be urged to sign a declaration prepared by an initiative group for its establishment. This will be published tomorrow or the day after, and will call for the formation of similar initiative groups in the provinces and in various regions of the country. A conference will follow, and then in November or December a Congress, at which the leading organs will be set up. I support this project, both as a parliamentary deputy and as a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU. For I think it is necessary to make a start. It might be that this party doesn't have fifteen million members, but only five-hundred thousand or even fifty thousand. Nevertheless it is necessary to lay the foundations, and to see how things develop. Personally, I think this is the most promising way forward for re-establishing the CPSU as a real left party, in the accepted Western sense of 'the Left'. I believe the Left should strive to renew society, not to revive old structures. The forces that are trying to revive the bourgeois system in our country are also trying to restore an old society in our country, one we have already experienced. They want a new type of bourgeois society, however, constructed on an American or Japanese model, but this is still capitalism for all its new qualities. We do not reject the need for private entrepreneurship and private property, or the need for this sector to be expanded. But it should be part of an economy based on healthy competition between public enterprises, one that permits the retention of an impulse toward development, of a stimulus to competition.

In addition, nationalist movements play a huge role in our country. Here as well, it is extremely difficult to divide them along the lines of 'right' and 'left', since there exists a diversity of nationalist movements, especially in Central Asia. There are, for example, nationalist

movements of a secular type; they want the formation of a national state, whether Uzbek, Ukrainian or Byelorussian. They call for the revival of the local language—both the Ukrainian and Byelorussian languages have lost a great deal of ground. Even in the countryside today many people speak Russian rather than Ukrainian or Byelorussian, and in the cities this is, of course, even more pronounced. Still, the languages exist, and the movements want to revive them and broaden their use at the official level and to restore the indigenous culture. Naturally, the different cultures have diverse degrees of vitality. To revive the Byelorussian culture, for example, is more difficult than to revive the Georgian one, because this has a thousand-year tradition, while the Byelorussian culture has relatively weak roots. In Central Asia the movement for the formation of a secular culture and a secular state comes up against a very strong Islamic nationalist challenge.

*Could you tell us more about the problems of the Communist Party. It's not at all clear what the legal basis was for the steps that were taken against it. Did Gorbachev call on the Central Committee to meet after the coup collapsed?*

No, he didn't convene the Central Committee. Gorbachev simply renounced his powers as leader of the party. He didn't convene the Central Committee; he took the decision himself.

*He didn't say that the Central Committee needed to consider the situation?*

For the Central Committee to do this, it was necessary for it to meet! But the Committee was organized along regional lines; consequently its members were highly dispersed geographically. Central Committee plenums took place four or five times a year, and people assembled from throughout the USSR. So Gorbachev didn't convene the Central Committee. He simply didn't recognize that he had any obligation to do this.

*Of course, he's no longer General Secretary, and he has no powers to order it to convene. . . .*

Absolutely no powers. Gorbachev, at the same time as renouncing his powers as a member of the Central Committee, issued a decree temporarily suspending the Committee's activity. Yeltsin similarly issued a decree suspending the activity of the Central Committee and of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and despite all of the contradictions and objections—I myself spoke out strongly against these moves—took the decision to suspend the activity of the party temporarily. They took advantage of the complicity of the party leadership in the putsch, and decided to halt the activity of the whole party. This was an unlawful and unjustified decision, and incomprehensible from any reasonable point of view. For example, if certain British Conservatives were shown to have engaged in illegal activity, the British parliament would not have resolved to ban the entire Conservative Party or to suspend its activity. All that would happen would be that particular individuals would be forced to answer for their actions.

*So the activity of the Communist Party has been suspended. How long is this suspension to apply?*

Until the process of investigating the party has been completed. The Prosecutor's Office has been entrusted with making thorough investigations in order to establish the degree of participation by the party in the putsch, and the matter is then to be handed over to the Supreme Court. The final decision will be in the hands of the Court. These investigations are going ahead, but not especially fast, because the consequences of the coup are unfolding much more rapidly. Moreover, these investigations have a rather pointless character. To investigate the activity of the entire party would take years. There are huge quantities of documents and archival materials, and all these would need to be gone through and studied. For the moment, this work is not going ahead. The archives are sealed, the filing cabinets are sealed, the Central Committee building is locked, and as a result the Central Committee of the party is prevented from meeting.

*What we are seeing, in effect, is an attempt to achieve the dissolution of the Communist Party through these methods.*

The goal has in fact been to dissolve the party, but this will not succeed, since the party will be reborn in the shape of a number of other parties with different names, programmes and statutes. The truth is that the party is a part of our social fabric; it represents part of our social life, of the social consciousness of many millions of people.

*What's happening with the property of the party? Gorbachev's decree didn't hand the property over to the state.*

No. Seals have been placed on the property of the party, and its accounts have been frozen, so party property doesn't belong to anyone at present. Formally speaking it remains vested in the party, but the party can't make use of it.

*That suggests that Popov shouldn't be using it either.*

He shouldn't be. But all the same, as I indicated earlier, the expropriation of party property is going ahead. Russian government ministries have now been moved into the buildings of the party Central Committee, because Russia is now establishing new administrative organs, taking over the administration of many branches of the economy that used to be the responsibility of the union ministries. Russia has now taken these enterprises under its jurisdiction, and is establishing new ministries to administer them. There are no premises in Moscow for these ministries, and to erect new buildings would take a long time. Meanwhile, the buildings of the Central Committee are standing empty, so sections are being taken over. This is of course quite illegal, but it's occurring anyway. All over Moscow the buildings of the party Regional Committees have been placed under seal, and now in some cases the Regional People's Courts are being transferred to these buildings. In the past the Regional Courts have had to put up with very poor premises—they're badly funded and have lacked the money for anything better. They have nowhere to keep people who are on trial. So the Courts are being urged to move into former party premises. For the present, however, most of the People's Courts have



refused to do this, since they are organs of law enforcement and understand that what they're being urged to do is unlawful. How can they move into buildings that don't belong to them? The Ministry of Justice doesn't want to carry out this decision of the Moscow mayor either. Besides, what if the Supreme Court decides to resurrect the party and restore its property? It has not so far handed down a decision. You'll recall that the amounts of property involved were very great—this was a ruling party.

*And, of course, the Communist Party's newspapers were taken from it.*

The newspapers are now coming out again. They are being published by their editorial collectives, which in effect have taken over the papers temporarily as their own property. But the printing works and other production facilities are the property of the party. The newspapers are being permitted to use these facilities, but they've been told that this will only be until November. And after this? Obviously unless a newspaper has printing facilities it can't come out. So the papers are setting out to prove that they have long since paid off the cost of their premises and equipment. The paper *Pravda* made big profits, which it paid into the party accounts. Its staffers calculated how many hundreds of millions of roubles the paper had contributed to the party, and on this basis they demanded that all the buildings and equipment be declared the property of the paper. But the court has still to make a decision on this claim. So, as you can see, these matters are now subject to a regime of complete arbitrariness. Closing the party papers turned out to be a very unpopular step by Yeltsin and the democrats. It was met with outrage even by people who had no love for these publications, by people who were opponents of the party but who maintained that the freedom of the press had to be general. They were saying: 'We don't like these papers, but they should still be allowed to come out, as opposition newspapers.' So Yeltsin was forced to allow all the party papers to resume publication. *Pravda* is appearing as an independent publication, and not as an organ of the Central Committee of the CPSU. But it makes clear that it is a party newspaper, that it holds to the views of scientific socialism, and that it will defend the interests of the rank-and-file members of the party, while not mentioning the apparatus. So now all these papers are coming out—*Sovetskaya Rossiya*, *Pravda* and *Glasnost*, and the local party newspapers in each of the provinces are also continuing to appear. But Popov, Yeltsin and various other democrats are preparing a new attack on these papers, which now they are in opposition are making wounding criticisms of the liberals. In general, the liberal democrats have found themselves in a difficult position: because the Communist Party has ceased to function as a distinct structure, there is no one to blame for all the failures of the economy, for all the mistakes made in attempting to solve economic problems.

Let us now consider what other groupings have emerged. We have recently seen the rise of several movements that describe themselves as 'leftist', but which have not yet managed to define their character clearly. One example is the so-called 'Movement of Left Forces' headed by Yakovlev and Shevardnadze. This movement was formed

as follows: Yakovlev, Shevardnadze and Sobchak got together, and for some reason Popov as well. They declared themselves a movement. Now they want to reorganize this movement into a party, but they have few supporters. As the saying goes, there are a lot of generals, but few rank and file members; most of the people who might have joined have already attached themselves to other parties, and are in no hurry to sign up with this one.

Vice-President Rutskoi has also announced the formation of a new party. Since this announcement, he has already succeeded in twice changing the name. At first the party was called 'Communists for Democracy', and he was hoping in this way to split off a section of the Communists from the Communist fraction in the Russian Supreme Soviet and the Russian Congress of People's Deputies. But there weren't many Communists there, so now he has renamed his organization the 'Party of Free Russia'. Whether this will turn out to be a left-wing or right-wing formation is something we simply don't know, since for the present it's not active in the political arena. It lacks its own press, its own newspaper, its own programme and its own statutes, and hasn't issued any political declaration.

*Might it turn out to be no more than Rutskoi's personal political machine?*

That might well be the case. There are people who have declared their adherence to this party. But for the present there is no party structure. There is no leadership, no central committee, and not even the most minimal party apparatus.

*There have also been initiatives by leftists who have never been part of the Communist Party—for example, the attempt to set up a Party of Labour.*

I've heard of this. A number of extremely varied initiatives have emerged, at least in part, from the trade unions. Several labour-party-type formations have arisen. One is the 'United Front of Workers' (OFT), which is a very conservative force. Other trade-union-based groups are not conservative. But many workers' organizations are very discontented with the liberals. I can understand why this should be the case. For the most part, the people who form the base are simple workers, who speak out against the rebirth of capitalism, against the revival of private entrepreneurship, and even against the cooperatives, since the people in the cooperatives get higher pay and live better, while the workers in large metallurgical and other enterprises work in very difficult conditions for wages that are nothing special.

Among the labour-party-type formations to have appeared are the 'Union of Moscow Workers', the 'Union of Workers of Moscow', and the 'Union of Workers of Leningrad' (Leningrad is now St Petersburg, but they've kept their original name). There are now a lot of these formations, since even among the workers you'll find diverse political orientations. For example, the miners came out against Gorbachev, demanding his resignation, and supported Yeltsin. They put forward demands which were not well thought out in political terms. For

instance, I do not think they were right to call for the resignation of the government and of Gorbachev, and for an immediate tripling or quadrupling of wages—for which the government simply did not have the money. So among the coal miners several trade unions are now active, an official union and independent organizations. There is also the all-union council of trade unions, which still exists.

You have to understand that we are now passing through a very uncertain period. I don't consider what is happening to be a revolution. It could be more accurately described as a process of economic crisis and collapse, together with resulting anarchy. This is not a revolution because so far no new structures have arisen, no new authorities have come to power. There is no new economy, and I would even venture to say that there is no new ideology. That is, there are none of the things that arise in revolutions. I certainly see the collapse of many structures, but I see no healthy new ones being established. This, for me, does not represent a revolution.

*Can you try to define the character of the Yeltsin government. What is its trajectory—toward democracy or dictatorship? What is its social base?*

This is not entirely clear. Yeltsin came to power with the support of democrats, and of democrats whose thinking, I'd say, was of a liberal bourgeois variety. If I were to make a comparison with Britain, I'd say that their persuasion was not even Labourite, but liberal and social-democratic. Yeltsin, however, is a person with an authoritarian mentality, and he wants to be independent of this political base. Now that he has been elected by popular vote, he is beginning to play the role of a dictator, of an authoritarian figure. This is why the newspaper *Kommersant* and other journals now talk about the 'Yeltsin enigma'. I've just cut out of *Kommersant* an article entitled 'Who are you now, Yeltsin?' Gorbachev was a predictable figure, but Yeltsin is absolutely unpredictable. We know how problems, questions and suggestions go into Yeltsin's office, and we see how decisions emerge, but we know nothing about how they are adopted, and we have little idea of who it is that takes part in making these decisions. Yeltsin changes constantly as a person and as a politician. He has now acquired enormous influence in Russia, and has managed to trample on Gorbachev. For a time, Gorbachev was submitting to almost any instruction from Yeltsin. He is now trying to escape from this tutelage by Yeltsin, and here are some recent examples. First we've seen the shift by Silayev to the Union structures, and his refusal to head the Russian government. Then yesterday we saw the appointment of Primakov to head the Office of Foreign Intelligence. This is a very interesting appointment, since Primakov is an academic who has never had anything to do with intelligence-gathering. He'd never even thought of taking on such a job. But the point is that the Office of Foreign Intelligence doesn't just gather intelligence. Its role is similar to that of the American CIA, but the Soviet body has under its command and at its disposal several large, specialized military detachments trained to carry out special operations outside the country. Some examples of this were the seizing of Amin's palace in Afghanistan, the seizing of the centre of Kabul, and of the centre of Prague. The commanders of

these detachments are being changed, but the structures remain. Gorbachev obviously sees these detachments, which have several thousand members, as an additional force for himself. He has taken control of the Office of the Protection of the President; it is no longer subordinated to the KGB but to him personally. With Silayev's shift to the Union structures, Gorbachev hopes to recover control of part of the administration of the economy. So he is doing his best to take back the power he's lost. Despite these manoeuvrings Gorbachev remains almost powerless, at least inside the country.

*Do you think there are any real prospects for the Party of Left Forces? People here are extremely suspicious of any kind of socialist ideas.*

Naturally, if we are talking about the people as a whole, there exists acute dissatisfaction, and this dissatisfaction has spread to the Communist Party and to socialism in general. But I wouldn't say that this discontent has a clear character, because in another year it might well turn against Yeltsin and all of the liberal democratic parties. People are dissatisfied, but they don't have a clear political orientation. They are not dissatisfied so much with the fact that they are living badly—they also lived badly twenty years ago—but, rather, with the fact that they live less well than they did before. Nowadays when ordinary people get together they will often propose a toast 'to the good old era of stagnation'—that is, to the Brezhnev period. Things weren't good then—there was corruption, there was the Communist regime, there was the authoritarian system—but there was sugar in the shops, there were sweets, there was milk. Now there is virtually nothing. This dissatisfaction obviously has an irrational character. People rarely understand that the transition to capitalist forms is likely to bring them still greater difficulties, as happened in Poland. But now, with the liberals in power, the position in the economy is deteriorating even faster than before. The management of the economy is disintegrating, economic links are being abolished, and now at the beginning of October the situation is worse than, for example, at the beginning of August. And the Communists don't even have a hand in it.

*Who, then, might be able to provide the unifying idea that would help preserve the morale of the Russian people?*

For the next year or two, no one is going to be able to put forward such ideas. I want to say that clearly this party we intend to establish will be in opposition for some time, both in the parliament and in the country as a whole. The party is based on the programme that you have no doubt read, and which was adopted as a draft by the last plenum of the Central Committee. This programme represents a significant step forward in the consciousness of Communists: it is not an old-style Communist programme, but a platform for democratic socialism.

*This party is going to have a very high proportion of former Communists both in its ranks and in its leadership. Won't this present an obstacle to its winning broad support?*

Naturally, this will represent an obstacle. But we don't have the right to deprive former Communists of the right to participate in political activity, if they agree with the programme we've adopted. On the other hand, it may be that many people who were unwilling to join the Communist Party because they considered it a conservative force will now want to join this new political formation, which has neither a dogmatic character nor authoritarian structure. The old party was a party of the apparatus type. It was part of the state structure, and there was no way that it could be reconstructed into a political organization. We want to establish a purely political organization which will have nothing of the state structure about it; it will be a political party, a parliamentary party. We must wait and see whether this succeeds or not; we are having to do everything for the first time, and therefore with no experience.

*Do you foresee any major split during the coming months between the people who support a more parliamentary-style system, and those who prefer a presidential system of the present Yeltsin type?*

There is already such a split, and it is broadening. I don't know how great it will eventually become, because it exists mainly on the practical level. The people who support a Yeltsin-style executive power say that the country is in crisis, the economy is falling apart, and that it's necessary to act quickly; priority has to be given to actions and not laws. Laws take a long time to draft, they have to be adopted, and in the case of laws on privatization, the banking system, and new credit relations, this process could take several years. Establishing capitalism, or even just a system of private entrepreneurship and of joint activity with Western business interests, requires new legislation. An extensive legislative foundation is required, and this doesn't exist in our country, which has operated according to entirely different principles. The parliaments are developing this system only slowly, because they lack experience and have no more than a limited understanding of the task. We can't simply borrow Western laws and expect them to work in our conditions. So a lot of people are saying that until legislation can be worked out, a process that will take many years, we have to show a preference for quick decision-making by the executive authority.

Supporters of parliamentary methods, on the other hand, complain that the executive power is making incorrect—and unlawful—decisions. They argue that Western business interests will be unwilling to make major investments in the Soviet Union if there exists no legislative base, because they could be told one thing today and another tomorrow. Today their investments will be welcomed, while tomorrow all of a sudden the construction of some enterprise or other will be halted, or there will be no materials available. Western business interests will invest money only if there exists a stable society and a stable state. If the state is viewed as a zone of anarchy and instability, no one will be willing to invest their capital. For this reason a firm legislative basis is required, a solid parliamentary structure. Rule by the executive power, a dictatorship, is not suited to economically effective collaboration and sits especially poorly with market relations.

These relations require a firm legislative basis, making it possible for conflicts to be resolved in the courts or by arbitration; they require the presence of banking, stock-exchange and insurance systems based on the law. And if they are not based on the law? Then not even a small cooperative can operate, because some ill-considered law might suddenly be adopted. For example, a new tax has now been introduced in Russia, to be deducted not from the profits of enterprises but from their incomes. And business entrepreneurs are saying: 'You are undermining private enterprise, because the tax should be deducted not from incomes, but from profits. The income of an enterprise might be less than its expenses, and it might have to pay tax even though it was making no profit whatever. The enterprise might well be declared bankrupt and have to shut down.' I am not an economist, but I know that this isn't the practice in the West.

So you can see that anarchy reigns both in the legislative sphere, and in the decisions of the executive power. The government takes a decision one day, and countermands it the next. We are in a period of transition, when the normal legislative activity of the Supreme Soviet, of which I'm a member, has been upset, because the composition of this body has changed. I don't know whether the people who have learnt the arts of the legislator over the past two and a half years, who have absorbed the experience of the Western parliaments, are going to remain in the Supreme Soviet. Perhaps these people are no longer in the parliament. We will see at the next session.

*Are you going to be there?*

I'll be there whatever the case, even though I'm not a member of the parliament. Under a statute that might seem strange to a Westerner, and which is comprehensible only to Soviet citizens, I am a people's deputy of the USSR, and I have the right to attend any sitting of the parliament, to speak and to move motions, and to work on a permanent basis in any of the commissions of the parliament. The only thing I don't have is the right to vote. But this isn't so important as the right to work in the parliament and influence its actions.

We have, as it were, two parliaments—one large one that meets once a year, and that now probably won't meet at all, and a smaller one, the Supreme Soviet, to which all powers have now been transferred. The Supreme Soviet can adopt any laws and even alter the Constitution. New members chosen by the republican parliaments are coming into it, but there is no guarantee that there will be many skilled legislators. I am not greatly concerned if I am a member or not, since as a Moscow resident I can attend any sitting. I now work mainly as a writer and journalist. I should say that our parliament still operates very badly in the following respect, that members have to turn up for every day of the sittings even if the question being discussed is of no interest to them. It would be more logical if they were required to be present only for the voting. Our parliament still hasn't worked out its procedures, and has none of the traditions of parliaments in other countries. We are still pupils.

*What is likely to be the character of the Union in coming years, if any Union*

*structures persist? What has come out of the discussions that have taken place over the past few weeks?*

✓ Since the coup centrifugal forces have increased, and all of the republics have now declared their independence. This independence is merely de jure; the republics remain an economic unit, and even a political and cultural one. How much further the centrifugal processes will proceed is difficult for us to guess. Some kind of Union agreement is obviously necessary, but the process of negotiating it has broken down. For the time being, the primary task before us is the establishment not of a Union agreement but of an economic agreement, because the economy has been grinding to a halt—there is a sharp decline in economic activity, and every day enterprises shut down because they lack raw materials or other requirements. There was a report yesterday of mines shutting down because there is no timber for pit props. The Ukraine is not supplying grain. Moscow is short of fuel. Food supplies in Russia are less than they were last year, because the collective and state farms are unwilling to hand over grain to the state at the current prices. To a considerable extent, anarchy reigns in the economy.

The Baltic republics that are now independent are interested in an economic agreement, because they can't survive if cut off from the Soviet Union. The Estonians need banknotes, and have asked the Soviet Union to print two billion roubles for them. Prices in Estonia are high now, production has declined, and they need banknotes in order to maintain trading links. The State Bank of the USSR has refused to issue them with these two billion roubles. If Estonia were part of the Soviet Union, such a request would be quickly fulfilled, since the money is needed to pay workers' wages. But now the bank replies: 'You are an independent state; establish your own monetary system. And why are you asking for roubles? There is no guarantee that tomorrow these roubles won't appear on the Soviet market and be used to buy up Soviet goods.' So the Estonian request has been turned down, and without banknotes Estonia can't conduct normal economic activity. The Lithuanians have asked Denmark to print money for them, but printing money for a whole state is no easy task. The Danes want a guarantee of sixty million dollars for the job, and it won't be done quickly. So Lithuania is continuing for the present to use Soviet roubles as its currency. The fact that Soviet currency continues to circulate in the Baltic republics indicates that they are a long way from economic independence.

✓ It is my view that the Soviet Union continues de facto to exist, because there is a unified system of communications, a unified monetary system, unified airlines and railways, unified military forces, and a unified administration of scientific research. However, these unified systems are working less and less satisfactorily. The Soviet Union as a whole is suffering as a result of this, and also the republics individually. No one is living a better life.

*There are people like Silayev who want to maintain a large state apparatus, much as has existed in the past, and others who want sweeping privatizations of large factories and concerns. Which of these trends is likely to prevail?*

I don't think either of them will prevail; instead there will be some kind of compromise between them. It is impossible to carry out a really comprehensive privatization of our economy. You can't privatize the railway system, for example, or the telephone system. It is not even possible to turn the giant vehicle producer KAMAZ into a joint-stock firm, though attempts are being made to do this. KAMAZ will continue to exist and operate as a large state enterprise, because it is connected by thousands of links to enterprises throughout the entire territory of the country. An enterprise as large as KAMAZ can't be administered only by the workers or by the organization's management. It can't be allowed to dictate to other enterprises that supply materials and components to it, because the market system hasn't been developed yet. Much the same applies to other large state enterprises, such as the state and collective farms, which provide most of the agricultural produce, including grain and animal products. So I think this argument between the privatizers and the supporters of large state enterprises will end in a compromise, because both forms of enterprise are needed. It is necessary to develop a system of small private enterprise, and where large-scale production exists it is necessary to retain it. We have to remember that some types of production—large aircraft manufacture being an example—can't be carried out on a small scale.

*Can you summarize for us the programme which, in your view, leftists in Russia should now be advancing. What are the main demands they should be putting forward?*

Naturally, the very first thing is to improve the management of the economy. Until we put an end to the economic crisis and increase output of consumer goods, so that there is a great deal more in the shops—everything the population needs, in fact—we won't succeed in achieving any of our political tasks. We have to make the maximum possible effort to ensure that people everywhere start working more effectively—the past several years have seen a decline in all areas except that of the press. Among the Soviet population there still exists a strong 'Give me!' mentality. No one thinks much about where these goods are to come from. We should recall the first demands of the Polish Solidarity movement: 'Give me more money! Give me more milk, meat, butter, television sets, refrigerators, furniture.' And where is all this to come from? It has to be produced. People say: 'Buy it abroad!' But to do that, we need hard currency. Programmes have been expounded, such as that of Yavlinsky, which suggest that because the USSR is collapsing the West stands to gain, and that because the Western countries no longer need large-scale military spending they should cut it and give part of the savings to the Soviet Union. But this is utopian. No one is going to give us anything for nothing.

*What would you want progressive forces in the West to urge on their own governments? Some kind of new Marshall Plan?*

I would advise them as follows. Of course there won't be any Marshall Plan for the Soviet Union. The Western governments should stress to every Soviet leader or economist they encounter that the Soviet Union



needs above all to rely on its own work and its own resources. This is a huge country with immense natural wealth—coal, oil, forests, and so forth. But now we are producing less timber than five years ago, and also less oil, coal and gold. Why is it that Britain, which forty years ago couldn't supply itself with food, now has a flourishing agricultural sector? Why is it that Europe, which before 1917 purchased grain from Russia, now has a surplus of foodstuffs? This is because European farmers and European agriculture learned to work productively, with the help of public intervention. The West ought to tell us that our wealth has to be the fruit of our labour. They should say: 'We will help you with our experience, with our technology, with our advice, and perhaps with particular items of equipment, but you have to create your own entrepreneurs and your own workers, who know how to turn out high-quality work. You have to train your own scientists, and develop your own science—you have enough people, talents and strength for that.' The West can establish business schools in the USSR, sell patents and technology, and send specialists to help people master this technology—but, naturally, for the appropriate payment. The West is welcome to provide aid, if it wishes. And the lifting of trade restrictions would give us a chance to compete. But in the first instance, the Soviet Union has to rely on its own strength.

*Does China provide an effective example here?*

Certainly. There is the example of Shanghai, and of other cities. China shows that what is needed is gradual, long-term aid, not merely over a single month or year, and access to Western markets. China has been dealing with the West for at least twelve or thirteen years. Western investment in the Chinese economy is of a relatively limited nature. There are of course spheres of activity in which the West can easily help: the service and tourism spheres, for example. Suppose you build a hotel for Western tourists. That is no doubt useful both for you and for us. But on the whole, it is not what our country requires. Our country has great human and natural potential but it is up to us to realize it.

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*Interviewers: Jonathan Steele and Renfrew Clarke*

*Translated by Renfrew Clarke*

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*Scanner*

Ronald Suny

## *Incomplete Revolution: National Movements and the Collapse of the Soviet Empire*

Early in September, less than a month after the abortive coup in Moscow, Soviet ethnographers gathered in Bishkek (formerly Frunze), the capital of the newly independent Kyrgyz republic, for their annual national conference. Confronted by the radically transformed political situation in what was repeatedly referred to as 'the former Soviet Union', those professionals who had engaged for decades in the study of the 'national question' were forced to deal with the unravelling of the very policies and state structures they had long defended. From the opening plenary session in the marbled hall of the local Lenin museum, through the meetings of the 'sections', held in Kyrgyz elementary school in a village on Lake Issyk-Kul, the discussions reminded one more of a parliament than of a scholarly convention. The immediate impression was that 4,000 kilometres from Moscow the spectre of the Soviet Union still haunted the halls, even as the first tentative steps toward independence were being taken.

Scrambling to make sense of the events that had recently destroyed Gorbachev's plans for a loose confederation based on a union treaty, the director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow, Valery Tishkov, spoke of the 'suicide of the centre'. The 'putchisti', the so-called GKChP (*Gosudarstvennyi komitet chrezvychainogo polozeniya*—State Committee for the Emergency), had tried to prevent the collapse of the Soviet Union by destroying the democratic and nationalist movements, only to deal the final blow to their last hopes of empire. Thinking broadly about what might lie ahead, Sergei Arutunov, a distinguished ethnographer whose work spanned the globe from Japan to the Caucasus, speculated about new nationalities, like the Cossacks of the North Caucasus, that were already being formed in the post-Soviet Union, and how in the relatively barren social world of the cities the intelligentsia might evolve into a new middle class. The Russian vice-president of Kyrgyzstan, himself a relatively recent arrival, defended the government's economic plans—privatization of industry and the renting of land. In an unplanned address the leader of the Kyrgyz Democratic Movement, Topchubek Turgunali, noted that though the republic was now independent,

business in the congress was being carried on in the old way, in Russian with no effort at translation into Kyrgyz.

A new state was being born, yet the presence of the old remained overwhelming. Several people lamented the demoralization of young people in the republic, who suffered from unemployment in a land in which the great bulk of the working class is Russian. Kyrgyz intellectuals, who spoke Russian fluently and without accent, passionately discussed the tragic events a year earlier at Osh, where Uzbek and Kyrgyz peasants had killed each other in a dispute over land. The Mufti of Central Asia spoke of the need for Islamic revival and requested that the government allow the Muslims to buy one of the now-defunct Communist Party's buildings. In contrast to those who emphasized the distinctiveness of the Kyrgyz, the Kazakhs and Uzbeks, the Mufti proclaimed that all the nationalities of Central Asia and Kazakhstan are one people and that the Muslim republics should be united. In Central Asia, at least, ethnic and religious identities were still being contested.

As we sat in the uncomfortable little chairs of the first-graders, with a portrait of the child Lenin benignly gazing down, evident were both the tensions that had splintered the once *nerushtimyi soyuz* (indivisible union), and the reservoir of shared experience, interdependency, and even good will, that makes a complete disintegration of what was the USSR such a frightening prospect. Gail Lapidus, a political scientist from Berkeley, tried to locate the current confusing maelstrom of events in the broader process of global decolonization. The USSR was a unique empire, she suggested, an empire of ideology and institutions in which the totalitarian project of the state attempted to destroy civil society. Clear before all of us was how the revival of that social world, both in its democratic assertiveness and its ethno-national cohesion, had sundered the bonds of pseudo-federalism.

### The Odd Empire

For all the reluctance of many on the Left to call the Soviet Union an empire, that conventional description revealed certain buried truths about the nature of the federation. If one thinks of empire as a state or system of states made up of diverse peoples or nationalities in which one people is privileged in its relationship with the central authority and other subordinate peoples, the inequitable relationship between Russians and non-Russians, reflected in the overrepresentation of the former in institutions of power and masked by the rhetoric of internationalism, was palpable on a daily basis to all the peoples of the Soviet Union. Non-Russians understood the necessity of conforming to Russified cultural practices, adopting the Russian language, and adapting to the political and social dominance of Moscow. The original impulses of Lenin's nationality policies, intended to reverse Russian privilege and undermine Great Power chauvinism, had long ago been distorted by the dominance of a single Communist Party that stripped the federal units of any meaningful political autonomy, and by the particular policies of Stalin that curbed the possibility of 'national communisms' in the border republics.

Moscow had governed through local national cadres and promoted national cultures, education in the local languages, and the advancement of native leaders—all within the bounds of a policy that favoured eventual rapprochement (*sblizheniie*) and even merging of nations (*slivaniie*). The deeply contradictory policy of the Soviet state, on the one hand, nourished the cultural uniqueness of distinct peoples and thereby increased ethnic solidarity and national consciousness in the non-Russian republics, and on the other, by requiring conformity to an imposed political order frustrated full articulation of a national agenda. In important ways the Soviet empire was like other empires that at one and the same time 'modernized' through economic developmental programmes but produced the possibility of communication and interaction, repression and reproduction of cultural practices, that made nationality more articulate and nationalism the most potent expression of denied ambitions.

Between centre and periphery power relations were always unequal and limiting, but in the seventy-four years of Soviet power the subject nationalities gained their own subsidized intelligentsias, institutionalized in republican universities and academies of sciences, as well as a new presence in their own capital cities. Ethnic identity was officially recorded and became the path to privilege, while class identity fell away, to be finally removed from internal passports in 1974. The contradiction between emerging nations fostered by Soviet policies and the maintenance of empire became ever more difficult to contain within acceptable bounds by a decaying Soviet state.<sup>1</sup> Under Krushchev and Brezhnev much authority was surrendered to local national elites that ran the republics, particularly in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, as fiefdoms to be exploited for the benefit of a party aristocracy. Corruption and nationalism grew hand-in-hand, limiting the Kremlin's writ in the borderlands. Indirect rule created non-Russian 'mafias' of extraordinary wealth and power, entrenched within the Communist parties and based on local kinship networks, school friends, and growing up in the same village or *aul*. Not surprisingly, the high living of many Caucasians and Central Asians led Russians to believe that the mode of exploitation in the USSR, unlike more traditional empires, ran from centre to periphery, rather than from colony to metropole. In fact, the non-Russian republics, particularly those of the south, benefited from cheap Russian resources, investment, factory production, and Russians who migrated as labourers to their region.

The Soviet empire in the post-Stalin decades maintained itself through tolerance of diversity and local national control with the ultimate sanction of the threat or use of armed force (as in Tbilisi in 1956, Brevan in 1965, Alma-Ata in 1986, Baku in 1990). But underneath the deceptive stability of the political structures, a fuse had already been lit in the 1960s—with the appearance of a powerful, articulate civil society expressing itself in a national idiom. Though effectively

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<sup>1</sup> The roots of the national crisis in one set of republics were explored by me in an earlier essay, 'The Revenge of the Past: Socialism and Ethnic Conflict in Transcaucasia', *NLR* 184, November–December 1990, pp. 5–34.

contained until the Gorbachev revolution, the dissident movements of the 1960s–1980s shaped the oppositional discourse and generated the leaders (Levon Ter Petrosyan in Armenia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Georgia, Ivan Drach in Ukraine, to mention but a few) who would later re-emerge as spokespeople for the nation in the late 1980s. Nation and democracy both proved to be subversive to empire, for neither would tolerate the supranational relationship of superordination and subordination dictated by the imperial system.

### Gorbachev and the Road to a New State Structure

In the already enormous and still-growing literature on the Gorbachev revolution at least three general views on the prospects of reform in the USSR have emerged. The most prominent in the West for much of the first five years of Gorbachev's rule was a conservative pessimistic view that real reform toward a modern democratic state was impossible within the USSR, that either the efforts of the general-secretary were unauthentic and insincere or the built-in resistance of Russia's political culture or the Soviet bureaucracy doomed his plans for reform to failure.<sup>2</sup> Here Gorbachev, like his mentor Andropov, was seen as a kind of dynamic Brezhnev, whose limited reforms were meant to integrate Western technology and productivity into an essentially post-Stalinist party/state. The Brezhnev record, however, had shown that such limited Western borrowings might create a militarily powerful adversary but could not reverse the economic stagnation. Less often present in the Sovietological discourse but available in the media was a liberal optimistic view that Gorbachev intended (and would be able to carry out) a radical, indeed revolutionizing, reform that would bring the Soviet Union back to the tolerant pluralism of the New Economic Policy and possibly further into a democratic polity and market socialism.<sup>3</sup> A third view, muted at first but increasingly vocal after the 1989 revolutions in East Central Europe, held that Gorbachev's reform from above would necessarily have to be radicalized, move to marketization, and would likely lead to the collapse of the Soviet Union as we have known it.<sup>4</sup> All three views recognized that radicalization of the reforms presented enormous dangers, but none saw how the revolution from above would be hijacked by a nationalist revolution from below that could not be contained within Gorbachev's limited vision. The development of civil society and coherent, conscious nations within the USSR inexorably transformed Gorbachev's efforts at state-building into a liberating process of state-dismantling.

Gorbachev's reforms, so tentatively begun in the Andropov mode in 1985, rapidly evolved into a revolution after the Karabakh events of

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<sup>2</sup> Such a view has been expressed by, among others, Richard Pipes, Marshall Goldman, Peter Reddaway and Alain Besancon.

<sup>3</sup> Such a view has been expressed by, among others, Stephen Cohen, George Kennan and Jerry Hough.

<sup>4</sup> Severyn Bialer, 'Gorbachev's Move' in Ferenc Feher and Andrew Arato, eds., *Gorbachev—The Debate*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1989, pp. 38–60; Cornelius Castoriadis, 'The Gorbachev Interlude', *ibid.*, pp. 61–83.

February 1988. After failing to win agreement from his own ruling party to democratize the apparatus from within through multi-candidate elections, the general-secretary proposed such elections to a new Congress of People's Deputies at the Nineteenth Party Conference in June 1988. These national, and later local elections, spelled the death of the Communist Party's monopoly on political power and occurred simultaneously with the outburst of mass nationalist movements, first in Transcaucasia and soon after in the Baltic republics. Gorbachev's failure to deal quickly and effectively with the Armenian protests in Karabakh and Erevan, the escalation into violence with the Azerbaijani pogrom at Sumgait, and the apparent willingness to tolerate mass demonstrations, encouraged national oppositional elites in those republics where the intelligentsia had in part wriggled free of the Communist ruling groups. In Armenia, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Moldavia, and later Ukraine and Byelorussia, intellectuals and activists began, first in the spirit of glasnost and perestroika and carrying portraits of Gorbachev, to form national and popular fronts and to put forth ethno-cultural demands against the Russifying programme of the CPSU. In Azerbaijan and Central Asia, where dissident movements had not previously existed and a closer relation between the apparatus and the intelligentsia was the norm, the Communist parties maintained their influence and managed to suppress the relatively weak 'democratic' oppositions.

By the autumn of 1988 both Estonians and Lithuanians had founded mass popular fronts. The Lithuanians successfully agitated to be allowed to display their national flag, and on 16 November Estonia declared itself a sovereign republic. Much of the struggle through 1988-89 was centred on securing official recognition of the local language as the state language of the republic. When in April 1989 Soviet troops brutally crushed a huge demonstration in Tbilisi calling for Georgian independence, the ensuing reaction among the democratic forces, both in the relatively liberated press and in the opening sessions of the new Congress of People's Deputies, made it nearly impossible for the Kremlin to use force against the burgeoning national movements. Gorbachev's more conservative comrades, led by Egor Ligachev and implicated in the Georgian tragedy, were reined in for a time, and for the next year the Soviet army was used only in cases where interethnic fighting necessitated armed mediation (Fergana in June 1989, Azerbaijan in January 1990, Dushambe in February 1990, Osh in June 1990). By the end of 1990 all the union republics and most of the autonomous republics responded to the rapidly weakening central state and the examples set by the former East European satellites to declare themselves sovereign, in several cases independent states. The empire was dying, and the new form of union/disunion was to be negotiated on the basis of equity and mutual respect. Gorbachev's commitment to democratic reform made impossible a resort to the kind of physical force that had originally forged the empire and preserved it for seven decades.

Mindful of the failure of the last major efforts at reform by Khrushchev and Kosygin, Gorbachev and his small group of reform-minded politicians understood that success or failure depended on the

implementation of a strategy that would accomplish three goals simultaneously: democratization or at least neutralization of the conservative *apparatus*; mobilization of civil society, particularly the 'liberal' intelligentsia, both to criticize the old system and its practitioners and to stimulate popular participation in perestroika; and initiation of a series of political and economic reforms that would both erode the power of the conservatives, most centrally the old Communist Party, and institutionalize democracy within society and within the party. This strategy was fraught with dangers and required manoeuvring between the conservatives and the liberals, placating one without overly frightening the other, all the time pulling the whole machine and the country toward democratic reform. Gorbachev skillfully held together a broad coalition of party leaders, from Aleksandr Yakovlev and Boris Yeltsin on his left to Egor Ligachev on his right, and gradually undermined the centres of Communist power. But his necessary vacillations, first to the side of reform, then toward retrenchment, his inability to control extramural disruptions and violence, and the worsening economic crisis combined to undermine his popularity and authority and polarize Left and Right. Reversing Brezhnev's strategy of Western borrowing while preventing any significant reform at home and maintaining the empire abroad, Gorbachev linked domestic economic modernization to a retreatist policy abroad—the withdrawal from Afghanistan and East Central Europe, major concessions on arms reductions, collaboration with American leadership in the Gulf War—all in the hope that conversion of military spending would prime the economic pump at home and that aid would be forthcoming from less threatened capitalist countries.

What was not fully realized by Gorbachev himself was the extent to which the USSR was no longer (if it ever had been—except under the forced homogenization of Stalinism) a single society. The fiction of a united *sovetskii narod* (Soviet people), proposed and defended by Soviet theorists of ethnicity, certainly reflected important shared characteristics of large numbers of educated urban Soviet citizens, but it was belied by the powerful identification with nationality, not only of those villagers untransformed by the Soviet experience, but also of many intellectuals. Within the pseudo-federalism of the Stalinist and post-Stalinist states, nations had grown up that were linked to specific territories formally established and bounded just before or during the Soviet period. In some cases the titular nationality in a republic made up only a minority of the population, as in Kazakhstan, Tatarstan or Abkhazia. Yet they were given cultural and political privileges within their ethnic territory; local elites were in control of political patronage; and their intelligentsias had a stake in the maintenance of strong separate territorially rooted nationalities. At the same time, as the Soviet economy ground down after the mid 1970s, one nationality after another began to express a profound anxiety about the approaching dangers to their culture, language, demographic, economic and ecological future. In the USSR the Green concern about environment found its most consistent allies among the tricolour supporters of the national cause. In the emerging reconstruction of their own history the nationalists identified the Soviet experiment as



the enemy of essential, authentic, natural national aspirations. No sense of the formative influence of the Soviet experience in the making of nations entered the new discourse of separatism.

### Radicalization

Breathing life into the moribund system that uninhibitedly called itself 'socialist' for so many decades required much more radical reconstruction than most Communists, even the general-secretary himself, foresaw. Gorbachev's first campaigns were modest indeed—the struggle against the plague of alcoholism and a campaign à la Andropov for greater labour discipline and productivity. Step by step, as if responding to an internal logic of reform, the progressives in the party improvised the dismantling of the 'administrative-command system', but without replacing it with a working economy or effective democratic polity. In order to demonstrate how systemic was the stagnation that afflicted the country and to gain allies within the intelligentsia, the reform leaders promoted ever more open discussion of the ills of Soviet society. Faith in the socialist project had long eroded among educated people, but the subversive power of the new criticism undermined what was left of the authority and influence of the party apparatus. Glasnost eliminated within a few years the privileged position of Marxism-Leninism, and the rewriting of Soviet history moved back in time beyond the permitted critique of Stalinism into a fundamental rereading of Lenin's revolution. The will of the *nomenklatura* to resist the popular discontent, now legitimized by the policy of glasnost, dissipated. Spasmodic attempts by conservatives to reverse the trends set in motion by Gorbachev, such as the infamous Nina Andreyeva letter of March 1988, only exposed their opposition to perestroika, which had become official party policy.

Even as he chipped away at the party's power, Gorbachev remained the principal force standing between the Soviet Communist Party and the fate of its little brother parties in East Central Europe. His conservative opponents knew that if he were removed from his post by the *apparatus*, the party would lose its last shreds of legitimacy and support among the population. For those who feared that Gorbachev had created the conditions for the break-up of the Soviet Union, his political demise would realize just those anxieties. The separatist movements in the Baltic and the Caucasus would realize their programme of independence, and other republics would soon be encouraged to follow. At the same time Gorbachev's eroding of party authorities dug away at his own most effective instrument of power. The new state structures he created gave him new prestige and international recognition, but as one who was reluctant to face a popular election, his ultimate legitimacy could be questioned.

No alternative programme to Gorbachev's increasingly radical reforms was articulated by influential political figures until the summer of 1990. From the Left he was faced by constant carping by radical intellectuals and politicians to go faster, but Gorbachev believed that the Moscow and Leningrad democrats did not appreciate how isolated they were, how conservative much of the

countryside remained, and how dangerous still were the 'forces of order' in the KGB, MVD and the army. Boris Yeltsin's populist opposition to the privileges that go along with party position was very attractive to voters, but his political skills fell far short of the coalition builder and pragmatic compromiser Gorbachev. More ominous through 1990 were the subdued voices from the Right, like those of the leaders of the Russian Republic's Communist Party and the Russian Writers' Union, that called for a return to discipline and order. With fewer goods to buy and the new freedoms disruptive and threatening, significant numbers of Soviet citizens responded to appeals for stability and grew nostalgic for old times when security and predictability provided what comforts they had.

Gorbachev's preferred solution for the 'national question' was a return to Lenin's nationality policy, a genuine federalism to replace the Stalinist emasculation of the federation. He spoke of restoring the violated rights of Soviet Germans, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, Kalmyks, Balkars, Karachai, Chechens, Ingush, Greeks, Koreans and Kurds, but consistently rejected demands for redrawing the administrative boundaries in the USSR. '*Perestroika* is not *perestroika* (resewing)', he is purported to have said. But Lenin's policies toward the non-Russians had been, like so many of his other initiatives, a combination of principle and pragmatism. Gorbachev repeatedly opted for more pragmatic solutions to the interethnic conflicts that threatened his programmes, but was confronted by the radical implications of Lenin's principles. National self-determination to the point of separation had been enshrined in a constitutional guarantee of a right of secession from the Union, a timebomb that lay dormant through the years of Stalinism only to explode with the Gorbachev reforms.

The end of the Communist monopolies on power in Eastern Europe and the abrupt end to the Cold War division of Europe accelerated the drive for full independence by a number of nationalities. Whereas 1988-89 had been marked by a few declarations of sovereignty and the establishment of official languages in the republics, 1990 witnessed a succession of declarations of both sovereignty and independence, beginning with Lithuania's declaration of independence in March. Most threatening to Gorbachev was the election of Yeltsin as chair of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet and the subsequent declaration of sovereignty by the Russian republic. Though not identifying himself with the more chauvinistic and anti-Semitic Russian nationalists, most of whom were deeply anti-democratic and anti-Western in their outlook, Yeltsin skilfully built a base of support for himself by combining populist opposition to Communist privileges, assertions of Russian nationhood, and an unwavering commitment to rapid democratization.

Despite foreign-policy and domestic political successes, such as his election as president of the Soviet Union by the Congress of People's Deputies, the Communist Party's surrender of its monopoly on power, and the implementation of a multiparty system early in 1990, Gorbachev was plagued by his inability to effect economic reforms. Drastic shortages of food in Soviet cities eroded support both for

Gorbachev personally and for his programmes. His triple revolution—democratization, decolonization, marketization—foundered on the third. The major beneficiary in the central cities was Yeltsin, in the republics the nationalist leaderships.

### The Final Crisis

In the summer of 1990 the liberal Left acquired its own programme of reform—the famous Shatalin Plan of radical economic reform within five hundred days.<sup>5</sup> Though more a sketch for change than a detailed plan, the 500-Day Programme became the basis for a brief political alliance in late July between Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

But while Shatalin was visiting the United States, Gorbachev retreated, perhaps fearful of the consequences both to the managerial elite and the already burdened populace. The Supreme Soviet approved a much more moderate plan for change, basically gutting the 500-Day Programme, and smashing the alliance with Yeltsin and the democratic reformers. Why he changed his mind and began a dramatic shift to the right remains a mystery, but in the next several months Gorbachev pushed forth emergency measures and made a series of appointments of well-known conservatives to key positions.<sup>6</sup> Both the democratic opposition in the USSR and many scholars and pundits in the West at the time believed that Gorbachev had now shown his true colours, that all along he had been only a reluctant reformer. One prominent American historian of Russia told a gathering of senators that the Soviet president was 'a front for the KGB'. Though it is still impossible to know for certain Gorbachev's motivations, there is reason to believe that the 'forces of order'—the army, KGB, MVD, conservative Communists and Russian nationalists—had reached the limits of their tolerance for reform by the fall of 1990 and were threatening action, that Gorbachev moved to the right to contain the Right, and that his actions after April 1991 and particularly during the August coup should remove any doubts about his sincere commitment to democratization.

Symptomatic of the mood of the conservatives were the words and actions of Viktor Alksnis, a young military officer of Latvian descent, who led a caucus of about five hundred within the USSR Congress of Deputies called *Soyuz*. In an interview in November 1990, Alksnis supported Gorbachev's programme of emergency measures and defended the 'command system' which had effectively restored the Soviet economy in the five years following World War II. The Right

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<sup>5</sup> In Soviet parlance 'the Right' are those who defend the command economy and the privileges of the ruling party, 'the Left' those who attack the one-party regime and advocate the market. Left/Right is determined not by content of programme, but by the degree of commitment to radical and rapid change from the post-Stalinist status quo toward a democratic polity and a market economy.

<sup>6</sup> Aleksandr Yakovlev, one of Gorbachev's most radical advisors, was hounded from his positions in the party. Vadim Bakatin, the liberal Minister of Internal Affairs, was replaced by the hardliner Boris Pugo. Eduard Shevardnadze surprised the world by his emotional resignation as foreign minister and his warning that a 'dictatorship was coming'. Nikolai Ryzhkov was replaced as prime minister by the conservative economist, Valentin Pavlov.

was also entrenched in a number of influential newspapers—*Pravda*, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, *Literaturnaya Rossiya*—as well as the *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, published by the Ministry of Defence, which in November printed excerpts from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Effective state power had been eroded by a 'war of laws' waged between the central Soviet government and the republics, and presidential decrees could not be enforced locally. As Soviet political scientist Andranik Migranyan put it, 'There is no verticality of power.' As the crisis between the Baltic republics and the Kremlin heated up in November and the food crisis intensified on the eve of winter, Gorbachev hesitated to accelerate the reforms and instead made a tactical accommodation with the Right.

The conservative turn was marked by efforts to shore up the eroding prestige and self-respect of the army. Gorbachev decreed that local officials could not refuse residence permits for out-of-republic servicemen who were performing their military service, and that republics could not restrict the military draft and encourage draft evasion. Defence Minister General Yazov warned on television that all actions against the army would be punished. An *Izvestiya* correspondent noted that 'a disrespected, defamed and offended army inevitably becomes socially dangerous.'<sup>7</sup>

The restructuring of the central government and the increase of power in the hands of Gorbachev in December could not resolve the fundamental political problem in the USSR—the relationships between the centre and the peripheries, most importantly the Union republics. This problem was daily linked to the underlying problem of the economy. Ukrainian deputy to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, V.P. Fokin, told Ryzhkov in December that his government had 'been unable to create an effective system for the state administration of the economy. So don't keep us from doing it: Support the republics' striving for independence in the handling of economic questions. If you don't, no forcible pressure, no decrees or incantations will lead to a stabilization of the situation.' Ryzhkov replied that an 'undeclared war' has been leashed against the government that aims 'to strike a blow at the state, at the sociopolitical system, and to crush it once and for all.' The war is being waged 'under the flag of the market'. The government, he went on, is in favour of sovereignty for the republics but also of the sovereignty of the Union as a whole. It was, after all, the government that began transferring prerogatives of the centre to the republics. 'At the same time, we have always favoured the preservation of the Soviet federation's territorial integrity, the preservation of its social choice and single economic space, and the observance of all rights of citizens and peoples throughout the Union.'<sup>8</sup>

Opposition to this policy was led by Yeltsin who argued that the political logic of the government was to wreck the republics' sovereignty and sabotage radical reforms. 'The so-called revolution from above

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<sup>7</sup> *Izvestiya*, 1 December 1990.

<sup>8</sup> *Izvestiya*, 20 December 1990; *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XLIII, no. 52, 30 January 1991, pp. 3-4.

has ended. The Kremlin is no longer the initiator of the country's renewal or an active champion of the new. The processes of renewal, blocked at the level of the centre, have moved to the republics . . . The Union has lost at least six republics as a result of its policy of pressure . . . ' A lesser known deputy, Obolenskii, declared: 'There is a risk that an authoritarian regime might be established, but it is still smaller than the probability of the country sliding into the chaos of a new bloody dictatorship.' Gorbachev has to decide which side he is on.<sup>9</sup>

After surviving a vote of confidence in the Congress of People's Deputies, Gorbachev called for 'firm power' and proposed a referendum on a union of sovereign states. The results in each republic would be a final verdict, and then the law on secession would apply. He stated he was for 'a union of sovereign states with a new division of authority, but a single state nevertheless.' At the same time he suggested a referendum on property laws.

Tensions increased in mid December 1990 in the Baltic region. Mysterious explosions occurred in Riga. On 8 January workers marched to the Lithuanian parliament to protest against price increases and demand the resignation of the government. Water cannons dispersed the crowds. The price rises were rescinded, and Prime Minister Prunskiene resigned. Gorbachev called on Lithuania to restore the full force of the USSR and Lithuanian SSR constitutions, but President Vytautas Landsbergis refused to restore what he labelled the 'constitution of invaders' and called for civil disobedience. A pro-Soviet minority movement called for direct presidential rule of Lithuania, and on 11 January a mysterious 'Committee for National Salvation of Lithuania' was announced. That same day Soviet MVD troops occupied the Vilnius Press House, and shots were fired. Gorbachev responded by dispatching a mediation team from his Council of the Federation, but just after they reached Vilnius thirteen people were killed in the fighting.

Another Committee of National Salvation appeared in Riga, and the pro-Soviet Black Berets, acting on their own but confident of support from the central Ministry of the Interior, initiated clashes in which five people were killed. A huge rally of more than 100,000 people was held in Moscow, organized by the opposition on 20 January to protest against the events in the Baltic. The democrats were convinced that a coup had been planned in the Baltic, only to be thwarted by resistance and lack of will. Pugo defended the actions in Vilnius as self-defence. Gorbachev responded to the Baltic crisis with regret, but argued that the clashes were the result of intransigence on the part of the Lithuanians. He ordered, however, that no troops engage in unauthorized activity and that no one be allowed to appeal to the armed forces in the political struggle.

It is probable that to enforce the existing laws and preserve a state that had lost much of its legitimacy, Gorbachev went along with the crackdown in Vilnius in a gamble that a show of force might

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

strengthen his hand both with the conservatives in the centre and against the nationalists on the periphery. He had to demonstrate to wary supporters and suspicious opponents, first, that he was able to prevent disintegration and chaos from engulfing the country and, second, that he remained committed to progress toward democracy. Paradoxically, the result of the clumsy repression in the Baltic was not the feared end of democratization, but a demonstration of the limited value of bayonets. Whatever the reasons for the actions in the Baltics—and it appears that they were initiated by local pro-Communist groups and sanctioned by the conservatives in the centre—they embarrassed Gorbachev internationally and demonstrated the cost of his alliance with the Right.

In the following months the political polarization between Left and Right found Gorbachev increasingly isolated. His measures to deal with the crisis—the withdrawal of 50- and 100-rouble notes in order to combat inflation, joint patrols of soldiers and policemen in Soviet cities, the crackdown on independent TV journalists—led to even more open attacks on him by the opposition. On 19 February Yeltsin went on central TV and called for Gorbachev's resignation. *Pravda* attacked Yeltsin for his personal ambition, and even the more moderate *Izvestiya* called his speech a mistake. The USSR Supreme Soviet debated the speech and adopted a resolution saying it was unconstitutional and created an emergency situation in the country. Gorbachev struck back at the Democratic Opposition in a speech in Minsk on 26 February. While affirming he was for political pluralism and democracy, he complained that the opposition was moving beyond legality and engaging in a struggle for power that was leading to confrontation. On this occasion he once again reaffirmed his own faith in 'the socialist option'. Gorbachev continued to believe that he could work with his comrades, Yazov and Kryuchkov (head of the KGB), and a reformed Communist Party. But conservatives within the upper echelons of the party, particularly in the Central Control Commission, pushed for removal of the leading liberals in the party. The Central Committee plenum at the end of January raised the question of removing Shatalin from its membership. In the next few months Yakovlev and Shevardnadze were attacked and eventually resigned from the party to form their own democratic political movement.

By March 1991 a stalemate had been reached between Left, Right, and the Gorbachev Centre. In the newly elected Security Council conservatives, like Vice-President Yanayev, Prime Minister Pavlov, KGB chief Kryuchkov, MVD head Boris Pugo, and Minister of Defence Yazov sat with Gorbachev advisors Yevgeny Primakov, Bakatin and Foreign Minister Bessmertnykh. Two problems were paramount: the failing economy and the break-up of the union. Gorbachev had no real programme for the economy but hoped to be able to achieve consensus on the union treaty as a necessary first step toward economic revival. On 17 March a referendum was held throughout the Soviet Union on the question of establishing a union of sovereign republics. 147,000,000 people voted, and 112,000,000 (76.4 per cent of those who voted) came out for the union. Six republics (Armenia, Georgia,

Moldova and the Baltic republics) refused to participate. Russia and others added further questions to the referendum. Though support for Yeltsin was strong in Russia (where his proposal for an elected presidency passed overwhelmingly), Gorbachev could be satisfied with the overwhelming vote for the union. His greatest support came from the countryside and the more conservative republics in Central Asia, and he did much less well in the largest cities, Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev. But he could argue that he now had a mandate for preservation of the Soviet Union as a free association of sovereign republics. In a move of great significance, Yeltsin placed on the ballot in the RSFR a proposal that the Russian president should be directly elected. This proposal was overwhelmingly approved. Elections, which Yeltsin was strongly placed to win, were scheduled for June.

As Yeltsin won new powers in the Russian republic, Gorbachev reconsidered his strategy. His turn to the right had effectively restrained the Right for five months. Now, with the Left more popular than ever, Gorbachev shifted once more. On 23 April, he met at a dacha at Novo-Ogarevo with Yeltsin and the leaders of eight other republics and worked out an agreement to finalize the draft of the union treaty, work out a constitution for the union of sovereign states within six months after the signing of the treaty, and carry out new elections for the union political bodies. 'The top leaders of the union republics taking part in the meeting, while recognizing the right of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldavia, Georgia and Armenia to decide independently on the question of accession to the union treaty, at the same time consider it necessary to establish the most-favoured-nation treatment for republics signing the union treaty within the framework of a single economic space formed by them.' No overthrow of elected bodies was to be tolerated, and the role of union republics was to be radically enhanced.

Both the drafting of the union treaty and the referendum indicated that the Soviet Union had fallen into two parts: the independence-minded republics (the Baltic three, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia) and the Muslim-Slavic mass which had voted for union. The Novo-Ogarevo agreement meant that Gorbachev had essentially agreed to recognize the sovereignty of all union republics and the right of those that wished to opt out of the union to do so. Though still faced by significant opposition from conservatives, Gorbachev managed to tame resistance to the treaty in the USSR Supreme Soviet and to force through a social-democratic platform in the Central Committee. In the June elections for the Russian presidency, Yeltsin easily triumphed over all rivals. Gorbachev's tactical accommodation to the Right made this possible, even if he was discomforted by the extent of Yeltsin's victory. By August the negotiations for the new union treaty concluded with plans for the formal signing of the treaty on Tuesday, 21 August. Confident that he had saved what he could of the union, Gorbachev left for vacation in the Crimea. On Sunday, 18 August, the hastily assembled 'State Committee for the Emergency' ordered Gorbachev's arrest, and the last hope for a Soviet Union was destroyed. The resistance offered by Yeltsin was strengthened by the fact that he was the legitimate and elected president of the RSFR. The tank crews

and KGB units sent to arrest him disobeyed orders, and refused to fire on the crowds surrounding the Russian White House. Yeltsin, as Russia's president and under the Russian flag, turned the tables on the plotters in Moscow. But, once again, we should not forget Gorbachev's own role in defying the pressure he was placed under and refusing to give any scrap of legitimacy to the actions of the so-called State Committee.

### After the Coup

In the whirlwind set off by the August coup the fraying fabric of the USSR finally shred into fifteen 'independent' republics. The institutions and instruments that had constituted the Soviet centre—the Communist Party, the state bureaucracy, the army and police—were all discredited, and the victorious democrats swiftly dismantled what they could. In response to the vacuum in Moscow and to the emerging power of the Russian republic, the non-Russian states declared their own independence. Yet at the same time the weakness of many of the republics, most importantly in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, and the economic dependence of the periphery on the centre, slowed the drift to full separation. After some confusion about what could be maintained from the old system, Gorbachev moved quickly to dissolve the Communist Party, convince the Congress of People's Deputies to step aside, and create a loose structure of economic and military coordination for the sovereign republics. Yeltsin's provocative remarks about rethinking the borders between the Russian republic and its neighbours with Russian diasporas created an uproar in Ukraine and Kazakhstan and forced a retreat to the pragmatic recognition of all existing borders.

The empire has exploded. The Baltic republics are fully independent states. Ukraine is moving rapidly toward full independence. Yet many national leaders understand the advantages of working with other republics and what is left of the centre to revive the economy. The most vulnerable of the non-Russian republics are certainly the three Transcaucasian states—Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan—and the five Central Asian—Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan—that make up the southern tier of the 'former USSR' and border on the northern tier of the Middle East and South Asia. Most of the Muslim republics (with the exception of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) remain in the hands of conservative Communist elites that supported the anti-Gorbachev conspiracy and are engaged in struggles between the old rulers and the fragile popular fronts.

Each republic is currently reassessing its road toward independence, while heeding with suspicion the calls from Moscow for a renewed economic and defence union. Georgia has moved as rapidly as the Baltic states toward full separation from the USSR, but has had neither the luxury of internal ethnic harmony nor clear international support. Enormously popular within his own republic, the Georgian president, Zviad Kamsakhurdia, is faced with an armed opposition opposed to his authoritarian treatment of political opponents but less concerned about the oppressive actions taken against ethnic minorities.



Armenia, the most ethnically homogeneous of formerly Soviet republics, is perhaps the most unfortunate economically—with nearly a quarter of the population homeless, the victims of both political and natural earthquakes. Fighting continues with neighbouring Azerbaijan, whose troops worked with Soviet forces to deport Armenians from their villages across the border. Armenian president, Levon Ter Petrosyan, was overjoyed by the political defeat both of the coup plotters and Gorbachev, whom Armenians saw as allied to the Azerbaijanis. Though Armenians fear that over time Russian chauvinism may present a new danger to small nations, the Yeltsin-Nazarbayev brokered agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Karabakh augers well for new interrepublican cooperation.

Opportunities and dangers face the former Soviet republics in equal measure. The governments of Moldova and Georgia can use their new independence to consolidate their hold over the whole republic, including the areas inhabited by minorities. But resistance may very well flare up in Abkhazia and Southern Osetia, among the Gagauz and Slavs in Transdneistria. The Communist leaders of Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, compromised by their backing of the coup, now use independence as a way of guaranteeing the continued dominance of their republics by the old mafias. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, the Baltic republics and Ukraine appear best positioned to achieve relatively democratic political systems, but the economic crisis threatens to undermine the fragile social peace essential for such an evolution. The draft agreement on economic association signed in Alma-Ata in early October by representatives of twelve republics still has to be ratified by their governments. If the Ukraine declines to join the new arrangement, this will put Russian predominance into sharp relief. The old empire is dead, but its former limbs, the national republics, have the will to live and to grow heads, arms and legs of their own. But Russia remains the key player because of its enormous economic potential and its military superiority. Whatever the new settlement, it is likely that the states of the Soviet periphery, whether independent or part of a post-Soviet commonwealth, will continue to orbit around the continental giant.

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*Madan Sarup*

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## **The Author**

Born in Punjab, India, Madan Sarup came to Britain at the age of nine. He became an art teacher and later a lecturer at London University, South Bank Polytechnic and at Goldsmiths' College. He has published extensively in the fields of sociology, education and Critical Theory.

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## Nationalism and Politics in Eastern Europe

In Eastern Europe, nationalism has since 1915 passed through five stages:

### *Stage 1*

At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the whole of Eastern Europe was divided between three empires. Previous little statelets, survivors of medieval fragmentation, were absorbed into the three large units. Life was greatly simplified for the political map-makers: henceforth they would need only three colours to accomplish their task.

The three empires were largely indifferent to the national principle. Each of them was based on a dynasty and on identification with a religion: Sunni Islam, Counter-Reformation Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity respectively. Faith and dynasty were held to be natural, adequate and appropriate foundations of political order. Each of the three empires was ethnically very diversified, but virtually none held this to constitute an obstacle to political viability. Many of the culturally and linguistically distinct proto-ethnic groups were barely conscious of themselves as ethnic groups. For instance, in Sarajevo, if someone was referred to as a 'Turk', this did not mean that he spoke or even knew a Turkic tongue or that his ancestors had come from central Asia via Anatolia; it simply meant that he was Muslim, and was perfectly compatible with being of Slav speech and indigenous ancestry. By contrast, at present, what is in effect an ethnic group, defined by a shared Slav-Muslim cultural background (but no longer associated with proper adherence to a faith), calls itself *Muslim*, and it secured the recognition of this expression as an acceptable category for official purposes such as the census. Just as a gentleman was not a man who knew Greek and Latin, but one who had at least forgotten these languages, so a 'Muslim' is no longer a man who believes that there is no God but God and that Mohammed is His Prophet, but one who has at least lost that faith. The irony is that in the days when religion really mattered socially, an *ethnic* term was used to define the community of believers; nowadays, when it is ethnicity that matters, a *religious* term is used to define an ethnic community.

Many of the groups possessed a base in the social structure rather than in territory: they were associated with a distinct social and

economic function rather than with some piece of land. Those cultural groups that were linked to the land were nevertheless linked to it in an incredibly complex patchwork, rather than in neat compact blocks. The important thing is that when the masters of Europe assembled in Vienna in 1815 and carved up the political real estate in total disregard of ethnicity, this was deemed perfectly normal. No wave of protest swept Europe. The sacred right of Ruritarians to self-determination, to their own cultural home and political roof, was ignored, without arousing much or any indignation on the part of either Ruritarians or anyone else. Most Ruritarians did not even notice, and were hardly aware of being Ruritarians.

## Stage 2

Soon, all this was to change. The nineteenth century rapidly became a century of nationalist irredentism. The nationalist principle, proclaiming that the legitimate foundation for the state was the nation, acquired ever more passionate and committed adherents. In Eastern Europe, the Magyars more or less succeeded and the Poles did not; various Balkan ethnicities benefited from the weaknesses of the Ottoman empire and secured diverse degrees of independence; in central Europe, the Italians and the Germans achieved unification.

Why this change of mood? Why did something which seemed acceptable and even natural in 1815 lose its legitimacy in the course of the century? From inside the nationalist vision the answer is simple: the nations had not been dead, they had merely been dormant. Thanks are due to devoted Awakeners, intellectuals eager to revive ancient political and cultural glories, or alternatively to codify the tongues and cultures of 'un-historic' nations, which had not previously boasted either a state or a court literature. The latter might be devoid of past glories, but the Awakeners were willing to invent them or seek new ones. The Awakeners worked hard, and the Sleeping Beauty nations in the end responded with passion to their kiss. Wide awake at last, they claimed their legitimate rights. In the light of Hegel's observation that nations only enter history when they acquire their own state, they insisted on securing their place on the historic stage. If denied it—and of course the old power-holders did not abdicate simply on request—they often reached for the gun.

Those who are not in sympathy with the new nationalist politics often accept its own image of itself, and merely invert the valuation without changing the picture. The most widely held theory of nationalism is, I suspect, the one that believes it to be not merely the reawakening of cultures, but the re-emergence of atavistic instincts of *Blut und Boden* in the human breast. Ever latent but long restrained by religious faith or other factors, the loosening of bonds allowed the barely restrained monster to re-emerge. The Enlightenment ideals of reason and fraternity, or the merely superficial, instrumental links of a market *Gesellschaft*, were too abstract, too bloodless, too cerebral to compete with libidinous and turbulent Dark Gods. Much Romantic nineteenth-century literature gave great encouragement to such a picture of man and so in a way endorsed its political implications. It receives further

confirmation from Darwinism, which after all teaches that man is a beast. From this it would seem to follow that you cannot expect too high, and above all too rational, a standard of political behaviour from him. Realistic politics must adapt itself to its clientele, and if society is really a herd, we'd better adjust both its authority structure and its symbolism to this fact.

Other critics of nationalism (for instance, Elie Kedourie) adopted a different view: nationalism was instilled by European ideology, perverting hitherto perfectly sound political systems. Marxists adopted a different explanation still: nationalism was a cunning, often conscious distraction of populations from the real underlying conflict between classes, the obfuscation perpetrated in the interest of ruling classes, having much to fear from class-consciousness, and much to gain from the encouragement of a spurious national consciousness.

None of these theories seems to me remotely acceptable. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century man is not more susceptible to the Call of the Blood than his predecessor: being better fed, more comfortable, more sedentary and pacific in his daily life (spent in an office or at the controls of a machine, not in a struggle with nature), he may even be a little less prone to atavism than his less educated, less urbanized, less domesticated grandfather. As for ideology, on its own I very much doubt whether it has such power to transform the political and moral climate. And it is very hard to explain the persistent and repeated victory of national over class consciousness as simply the result of astonishing cunning on the part of rulers. They do not otherwise display such amazing control over the human material they rule.

What then? The appeal of the nationalist principle—One Culture, One State—seems to me an inescapable corollary of the new socio-economic order, carried along by industrialism, and even by the shadow that industrialism casts ahead of itself. Agrarian society has an intricate and fairly stable structure, and culture—styles of speech, dress, consumption, ritual, and so forth—is not at all a suitable political principle within it. Its characteristic political units are either local communities, which seldom exhaust the culture they use (they generally share it with other similar communities), or empires that go far beyond the limits of any one culture. The former have neither the inclination nor the means to expand to the limit of their culture; the latter have no motive to remain within them (they are interested in the surplus and the obedience of their subjects, not in their folklore).

All this changes with modernity and industrialism. A fairly stable but intricate social structure is replaced by a mobile, anonymous mass society. In it, work ceases to be physical and becomes semantic: 'work' becomes the manipulation of people, messages, and not of things.

Work now presupposes the capacity to communicate in a context-free manner with anonymous strangers. Hence, it presupposes formal education, which alone can confer literacy and other required skills. Life and work also becomes one long series of encounters with

pervasive economic and political bureaucracies. Participation and effective citizenship and employability and dignity all depend on possessing mastery of the literate High Culture that is also the chosen idiom of the political unit in which one lives. To achieve such full citizenship, one must either assimilate into the dominant High Culture, or change the political boundaries so as to ensure that one's own culture becomes the defining one in the newly emerging unit.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europeans have adopted each of these strategies, sometimes in succession. Note that industrial society is the first society ever in which a formalized, codified, education-transmitted, context-free culture ceases to be the privilege and accomplishment of a minority of scribes, and becomes the pervasive style of an entire society. Political units cease to be Protectors of a Faith and become Protectors of a Culture. That, and not atavism, or the cunning of either ideologies or rulers, is the secret of the new force of nationalism. High Culture matters, matters desperately, for everyone. Real citizenship depends no longer on access to the rites of the city or its sub-units, but on mastery of an ethnicity-defining High (that is, codified, script-endowed, education-transmitted) Culture, and on acceptability by that culture, in terms of the stereotype it has, and enforces, concerning what a member should be like.

### *Stage 3*

By 1918, nationalism was triumphant. The three religious empires which had carved up Eastern Europe in 1815 were all sprawling in the dust. One of them, the Tsarist, admittedly recovered under new political and ideological management soon after, but let us leave aside, for a moment, that atypical line of development. On the territory of the other two erstwhile empires, nationalism was victorious, but its victory was somewhat Pyrrhic. The new units invoked the nation as their legitimating principle, but they were as haunted by ethnic diversity and hence conflict as their imperial predecessors had been. The complexity of the ethnic map ensured this. In some ways, the predicament of the successor states was worse: they were smaller and hence weaker, and their minorities included many members of the previously dominant cultural groups, the people who spoke the language, and more or less shared the culture, of the erstwhile imperial centre. These did not relish their new demotion, and could count on the support of their linguistic or cultural brethren across the border.

The combination of weakness, fragmentation and ethnic tension proved their undoing. They fell like ninepins to Hitler. Some resisted, some resisted perfunctorily, and some did not resist at all. It made relatively little difference to the speed of their subjugation.

### *Stage 4*

Throughout the 1940s, the ethnic complexity of Eastern Europe was in many places considerably simplified, first by Hitler and then by Stalin. The method of peaceful assimilation had done something in the past to further ethnic homogenization, but it was now supplemented by more brutal methods, notably genocide and forcible

transplantation of populations. There had been some earlier experiments in this direction, notably in the genocide of Armenians and the Greek-Turkish exchange of population after the war at the beginning of the twenties, but it was the forties which were *par excellence* the period of ethnic mass murder and exile: In consequence, certain previously plural societies became incomparably more homogeneous: Poland, the Czech lands, Byelorussia. Others did not 'benefit' from the crimes of Hitler and Stalin so much, and ethnic tensions continued to fester.

### Stage 5

Stage Five is not, as far as Eastern Europe is concerned, a historical fact. It is more in the nature of a hope, a wish-fulfilment, though some grounds for believing at least in its possibility do exist, both on the ground and in theoretical considerations. Stage Five, if it comes, or if in some places it is already beginning to appear, has a number of benign characteristics. It is marked by the greater and better diffused affluence of later industrialism. This means that hostility between culturally distinct groups is not exacerbated so much by jealousy and by the humiliation of a poverty visibly and consciously associated with ethnic status and treated as 'backwardness'. More advanced industrialism also more effectively modifies the occupational structure and standardizes cultures, so that their mutual differences become, at least in some measure, merely phonetic rather than semantic: they do similar things and have similar concepts, even if they use different words. The thesis of the standardization of industrial cultures is far from fully established, and is in many ways questionable (consider the industrial countries of the Far East); but for all that, when it comes to societies that in some measure share similar backgrounds and have long been neighbours, there is something in it. Economic and cultural convergence jointly diminish ethnic hostilities: late industrial man, like his immediate predecessor, early industrial man, still finds his identity in a literate culture rather than anything else, but his literate culture no longer differs quite so much from that of his ethnic neighbour. Above all, whatever cultural differences there still are, they no longer receive quite so much reinforcement from the fact that men on either side of the boundary may be at quite different points in the process of initiation into industrial civilization. (That feature still occurs in the relationship between an advanced host culture and *Gastarbeiter*, and of course aggravates or causes the tension between hosts and migrants.)

This relatively benign condition is at least approximated in parts of Western Europe, allowing for exceptions such as Ulster or Basque-land. It is not easy at present to imagine a war between Western European countries over an issue of territory. A condition is conceivable, and seems to be approaching, which could be described as federalization and cantonalization; as long as each major culture is endowed with its home base, guaranteeing its perpetuation, it no longer insists either on full independence or on the convergence of ethnic and political boundaries. This, at any rate, is the desirable end point of the development which, under industrialism, has transformed the relationship between culture and polity. After the storm, a relative calm.

## A New Secular Ideocracy

So much for a relatively abstract model of the evolution of ethnic-political interrelations between 1815 and the present. At this point, a very major factual point must be introduced, one hitherto largely ignored in the argument, mainly because it in no ways flows from the premisses on which the model was built. In 1815, *three* empires divided Eastern Europe between themselves. Two of them (or rather, the territories they occupied and the populations they governed) followed the trajectory specified in my argument. But the third one did not.

Tsarist Russia did indeed collapse and disintegrate. In the modern world its ideological cement proved no sturdier than that of its Ottoman and Habsburg rivals. On Russian churches the orthodox cross is superimposed on a crescent at the base of the cross, a symbolism sometimes explained as marking the triumph of orthodox Christianity over Islam. But when many of the churches tumbled under the Bolsheviks, the cross was brought down *with* the crescent.

Tsarist Russia was replaced by a new secular ideocracy, with a vibrant faith ruthlessly imposed, and though 'all the Russias' had followed through Stages One and Two, Stage Three was aborted: the Caucasus was reconquered by the Red Army in the early twenties, central Asia pacified and the Basmachis guerrillas destroyed by the thirties, the Baltic retaken in 1940 and 1944-45, and much of Eastern Europe, well beyond the line ever controlled by the tsars, brought under effective indirect rule.

The new secular ideocracy was strong enough to suppress the irredentist nationalism, as long as it retained faith in itself and the determination to use all means required to retain control. After 1985, perestroika was born out of a loss of faith in the economic methods of Communism, and the renunciation of the use of ruthless force was in part an ingredient of the recipe for the hoped-for economic revival, and in part a price for the retention of Western good will, which turned out to be essential for the new experiment. So came the end of determined repression—coercion is still used on occasion, but only reluctantly and under provocation and with political restraint. Under these new rules of the game, what happens to the ethnic situation?

One can formulate the question, but one cannot yet answer it. The evidence so far shows lurches towards each of those stages which this part of Eastern Europe, under Communism, had missed out: the stage of ethnic irredentism, that of murderous violence, and that of some striving for that final and more peaceful solution, the federal-cantonal Common Home, which avoids the murderousness and brutality of the penultimate stage.

History does not altogether repeat itself. Marx had said that it repeats itself in so far as what was a tragedy the first time returns as farce the second time round. One ought not trust this aphorism too much. There is no guarantee at all that what was tragedy the first time will not also be a real tragedy the second time.



But the circumstances are not altogether identical. First of all there is the desire by people of good will and sense to avoid the repetition of genocide and forcible transplantation. Any *à l'outrance* application of the national principle, requiring a convergence of ethnic and political boundaries, would inevitably involve such barbarism: the ethnic patterns of many parts of the Soviet Union are so complex as to ensure that there is no sweetly reasonable way of implementing that principle. Its application must be modified and accompanied by many compromises.

The political reaffirmation of ethnic identity is also being played out in new, indeed completely original, and historically unprecedented circumstances. Civil society had been crushed and atomized by Bolshevik centralism, by the fusion of all social hierarchy and organization—political, economic, ideological—in a single *nomenklatura*, a unique pyramid. It is true that, in the painful revival of civil society, it quickly became obvious that ethnic associations can be revived far more quickly and effectively than any others. The new political parties tend to be relatively small clubs of intellectuals, whereas it is the 'national fronts' which rapidly acquire real and persisting grass roots.

This might lead one to expect that this time round, nationalism will be even stronger than it was the last time. Previously, nationalist movements had non-nationalist rivals, often quite formidable ones. Nationalism was not the camouflage of devious class interests, as Marxists claimed, but all the same it did not completely sweep everything before itself. Rival principles of association were also operative. But at the same time, there can be no doubt but that there exists a genuine craving for civil society, for pluralism, for the absence of political and ideological and economic monopoly, and above all for the absence of that catastrophic fusion of the three forms of centralism.

This is the new background against which ethnic and other political revindications play themselves out. We can specify the factors which enter into the game; we cannot predict its outcome.

Moscow, September 1990

### Postscript

The above text was typed out rapidly in the course of an afternoon on a borrowed and dreadful Soviet typewriter, in the heavily guarded (scientific departments?) Academy of Science high-rise building on Leninsky Prospekt in Moscow, in reply to a pressing local request for a comment on the Soviet ethnic situation. There follow some afterthoughts, a year later, in Cambridge.

Raymond Aron used to say that there were only two real institutions in France—the state and the Communist Party. In the USSR, these two being identical, there was only *one* institution. So, in the absence of alternatives, the Gorbachevite strategy of trying to use the only

available institution did not seem to me wholly absurd. One could argue against it, saying that you cannot use an institution to destroy itself. One can argue in favour of it, and say that if only one tool is available, you have to use it.

It was my sensitivity to this argument (without full conviction, and without liking the situation that provided it with its premiss) which separated me and many other Western well-wishers of perestroika, from the Muscovite intellectuals who had come to loathe Gorbachev. (The difference was not based on any assessment of his personality or guesses about his political *penées intimes*, topics on which I do not presume to possess any insights. It was based simply on the outward, visible traits of a strategy.) But the sensitivity to this viewpoint was reinforced by an awareness of the fact that the only countervailing force, capable of matching the (alas) single available institution, was made up of *ethnic* movements, which could be and were mobilized rapidly and effectively. Yeltsin's willingness to use this counterforce frightened me. My fear was of course strengthened by the recollection of the sequel to the analogous break-up of the Habsburg empire, which led to a political system so feeble that it fell to Hitler and Stalin with barely a sign of resistance. Yeltsin was evidently doing what Lenin had done, abandoning all territories in the hope of securing allies or neutrals, whilst fortifying his position at the centre. Lenin had a disciplined party and ideological commitment, whilst Yeltsin enjoys neither of these benefits, which makes him correspondingly more dependent on the unleashed ethnic forces. Lenin could eventually turn to the much-invoked NEP: but people who invoke this now do not seem to realize that the real present equivalent of NEP would be some return to the old command-admin economic methods, on the principle (the genuine analogy to NEP) that a method you no longer believe in, but which is known to work more or less, and which people know how to work, is better than one you do believe in, but have not the slightest idea how to implement. The *perestroichiki* have about as good an idea of how to operate a market as the Bolsheviks had of how to build socialism. But the dismantling of the old structures also deprived Yeltsin of the option of a nationwide temporary use of the old institutions.

For all these reasons, I was doubtful concerning the Yeltsinite strategy, without at any time wishing to be dogmatic about it. However, events seem to have confirmed the correctness of Yeltsin's political intuitions. Gorbachev's appeasement policy does not seem to have bought off the Bunker. (It may, however, have contributed to its lukewarmness and hesitation and abstention from the use of ruthless methods.) When the backlash came in the form of the abortive coup, it was the fact that Yeltsin had built up a rival power-base, unfastidiously using whatever material lay to hand, that was decisive in thwarting the coup. This has to be acknowledged.

Cambridge, September 1991

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There can be no doubt as to the permanence and centrality that Aglietta thus attaches to the problems of uneven development of Department I and insufficient working-class consumption. As he explains: whereas in the crisis of the 1920s, 'the real issue was the all-around establishment of the regime of intensive accumulation', the crisis beginning in the mid 1960s, 'pose[s] a deeper question: are there limits to the transformation of the conditions of existence of the wage-earning class in the form of an extension of commodity relations?' It is in relationship to this underlying contradiction that Aglietta proffers a series of possible solutions to the crisis through further 'post-Fordist' restructuring of working-class consumption—most notably, the rise of a health complex.<sup>92</sup>

There is, however, a second account of the crisis to be found in Aglietta's work, ostensibly linked to the first, which has received much greater emphasis in the studies of the leading continuators of the Paris version of Regulation Theory, most prominently Boyer and Lipietz. From this standpoint, the crisis originates when capital accumulation slips off on 'the other side' of its tightrope: it now falls prey not to the unevenness between Departments I and II but to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall as a result of labour-productivity growth insufficient to raise the rate of surplus-value to a degree that can counteract the rising organic composition of capital. The current crisis is thus 'first of all a crisis of the mode of labour organization', expressing 'the limits to the increase in the rate of surplus-value that were inherent in the relations of production organized in this type of labour process'.<sup>93</sup> Fordism as a paradigm for organizing the labour process could henceforth deliver only declining productivity growth because, over the long term, management exhausted the gains that could be secured from an intensification of labour through Taylorist time-and-motion studies, job fragmentation, shopfloor reorganization and the introduction of new machinery on the basis of existing technology. Meanwhile, workers found themselves deskilled and alienated to the point that they no longer delivered the on-the-line technical innovations crucial to the growth of productiveness. As a result: 'The development of the department producing means of production encounters a constraint, since it no longer gives rise to technical mutations leading to a further mechanization of labour, capable of generating a sufficient saving in direct labour time to compensate for the increase in the organic composition of capital.'<sup>94</sup> For the Regulationists, then, the crisis of the Fordist mode of development manifested itself in a crisis of productivity, built into the socio-technical character of the Fordist labour process itself. This led to economic crisis by bringing about a sharp fall in the rate of profit from 1966 onwards.

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<sup>92</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, pp. 99–100, 163ff.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>94</sup> As Lipietz puts it, '[T]he search for "the one best way" by Taylorist methods reaches an end with the generalization of "scientific management" at the moment where social unrest on the line and the deskilling of operatives cuts off the basis of productivity, the ingenuity of the collective worker.' 'Behind the Crisis', p. 26.

<sup>95</sup> Aglietta, *Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, p. 162.

## 2. From an 'Exhaustion of Fordism' to Capitalist Crisis?

The relationship, in the Regulationists' framework, between their crisis originating in the uneven development of Departments I and II from 1958 and their crisis originating in productivity-growth decline from 1966 is not entirely clear. Aglietta argues that accumulation became unbalanced in the 1958–66 period because unit labour costs decreased too rapidly, bringing about increases in the rate of surplus-value and the rate of profit that were too large because they involved a rate of growth of Department I vis-à-vis Department II that required unsustainable increases in the demand for capital goods. Yet, Aglietta also argues that the decline in the rate of productivity growth from 1966, which reflected the failure of technical change to keep up with the growth of capital (organic composition) and brought a slowdown in the rate of decrease of unit labour costs, was problematic because it resulted in a decline in the rate of profit. The immediate question, therefore, is why the slower increase in labour productivity should not have ultimately benefited capital accumulation by reducing the rate of surplus-value and the rate of profit, thereby decreasing the rate of capital accumulation and thus the level of demand for capital goods required to maintain balanced growth of Departments I and II, in this way resolving the problem set off by the uneven development of Department I. Aglietta, in other words, makes a decline in the rate of profit, resulting from lower productivity growth, problematic from 1966, when he has made an increase in the rate of profit problematic in the period immediately before. Aglietta may be having too much of a good thing, playing both sides of his tightrope against the middle.

The tendency of recent Regulationist writing has been to ignore the issue of unbalanced accumulation in the years 1958–66 and to interpret the current crisis in terms of declining marginal productivity of capital within the Fordist labour process beginning in 1966. Nevertheless, the idea that the current crisis of profitability is derived from a decline in productivity growth resulting from the exhaustion of the Fordist technological paradigm is highly paradoxical—in view of the Regulationists' own characterization of the [Taylorist]–Fordist labour process, in view of what we thought we knew about technological change under capitalism, and in view of the actual contours of the crisis itself, its timing, scope and intensity.

As has been seen, Aglietta and the Regulationists characterize the Fordist labour process as a development on machine manufacturing (or machinofacture). As Leborgne and Lipietz put it: 'As a general principle of organization of labour or "technological paradigm", *Fordism is nothing more than Taylorism plus mechanization.*' Thus Fordist–Taylorist principles involve:

a rigorous standardization of operating practices and a corresponding separation between [...] conception (design, engineering) on the one hand and manual manufacturing on the other hand. [...] This rationalization through separation has two objectives. The first is to implement [...] the most efficient method (the 'one best way') and to eliminate both experimentation [...] and malfunctioning along the workbenches [...] to obtain gains in productivity and its strict meaning (the physical efficiency of

## *Russia Should Be Looking East, Not West*

It is difficult not to feel one has seen it all before as one watches the Western response to the request of the new Russian and Union governments for economic assistance. The 'grand bargain' has been dusted off the shelf on the Russian side and the more impressionable commentators again reminisce about the Marshall Plan. But those most directly briefed by the American and British administrations warn that little more cash can be expected than that already promised. In this area, at least, it seems that everything has changed in order for it to remain the same.

In London at the Group of Seven meeting and at his summit with Bush, Gorbachev displayed his customary skill in extracting a public-relations victory. But despite all the polite communiques he achieved no 'grand bargain'. The modest deal actually achieved bartered away surplus Soviet missiles in return for third-class 'associate membership' of the rich men's club. On 3 September Yeltsin called for massive reductions in missile stocks and indicated that Russia might take unilateral action to bring their stockpile down to 5 per cent of its previous level; meanwhile spokesmen for the new Soviet and Russian governments once again pointed to their urgent need for large-scale economic assistance. If the new Russian and Union governments carried out far-reaching nuclear disarmament this would be an extremely welcome development and they would earn huge moral credit for it. There might even be some grudging increase in help from the West but its scale would be likely to remain modest.

For Russia's good it must be hoped that Yeltsin will not be as fixated on all things Western as Gorbachev has been. Yeltsin is going to discover that the American and British governments will not commit serious resources to helping Russia and other former Soviet republics. Instead the latter's interests, properly understood, now lie in a 'grand bargain' with their neighbours to the East—Japan and China.

Even if the Western powers wished to put together a 'Marshall Plan' for Russia, and had no other urgent calls on their resources, they

would be unable to do so because they simply don't have the spare cash. The German government does genuinely want to help, and has done as much as it can, but the costs of unification and the unpopularity of raising taxes rule out assistance on the scale requested by Russian economists. Relaxation of the restrictions on trade would be welcome but of little short-term significance to an economy in free fall.

Unable to give anything more substantial, the West continues to offer advice instead. It aspires to teach Moscow how to transform and dynamize a vast bureaucratized economy sprawling over a continent. Bush, Major and their economic officials light-mindedly insist that the Russian mastodon must begin to scamper like a free-market greyhound. Some Russian economists, looking nervously at the first fruits of *laissez faire* shock therapy in Eastern Europe, are reluctant to attempt wholesale privatization. If we leave aside oil and other natural resources, Russian economic assets have no market value. The introduction of free-market conditions would therefore swiftly lead to sale of the oil, and other valuable resources, to foreign investors while the rest of the economy would subside into chronic dislocation and Russian workers would experience mass unemployment.

If Gorbachev and Yeltsin really wish to transform the Soviet economy then they should be sending their advisers and experts on study tours to China not the United States. And if they are looking for the funds needed to finance the transition to market viability then they should make a grand bargain with Tokyo not Washington. The only real cost here will be to Russian national pride. Russian leaders, who see no humiliation in being patronized by Bush and Major, may be frightened of seeming to defer to Orientals.

With the Soviet Union in full disintegration it would be bizarre indeed if the Russian leaders still draw the line at handing back the Kurile Islands to Japan. Throwing diplomatic niceties to the wind, the Japanese government has made it crystal clear that Moscow could have anything it wanted in return for the Kuriles. Perhaps the military still balk at responding to such appeals. Yet in any rational calculus it makes no sense to poison relations with Japan for the sake of islands of no economic value and of vanishing military significance. Any deal on the islands could be accompanied by guarantees that they be demilitarized and that Soviet/Russian access to the Pacific be unaffected. (It should be noted that the Kuriles are part of the Russian Republic, meaning that under the old Union their seat of local republican government was in the Russian White House in Moscow, many time zones away.) Within days of the defeat of the coup the Japanese government sent a high-level emissary to Moscow to restart negotiations, so conceivably we will soon learn of some progress towards a deal on the Kuriles.

However, even large credits from Japan could not resuscitate the Russian, or wider Union, economy unless accompanied by vigorous measures of internal reform. Here the Chinese experience is of fairly direct relevance to Russian problems. Because of Tiananmen Square there has been an understandable reluctance to celebrate China's



remarkable economic achievements in recent years. But it should be recognized that the Chinese economy has been one of the most rapidly growing in Asia for well over a decade now, with an annual growth rate of over 10 per cent.

Chinese consumers now have a choice of foodstuffs that would make a Muscovite's mouth water; they can also buy fridges, fans, bicycles and many other light-industrial goods in short supply in Russia and other ex-Soviet republics. Even more significant is the fact that Chinese light-industrial goods and textiles are now carving out a growing share of world markets—Chinese industrial exports have been rising more rapidly than those of South Korea or Taiwan. The really dynamic sector of the Chinese economy is locally owned rural industry, not the large factories controlled by the Beijing ministries, which are as inefficient as their Moscow counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

If the economies of Russia and the other former Soviet republics are to be revived it is far more likely to be done by encouraging autonomous municipal and republican collective enterprise, on the Chinese model, than by the ruinous dogmas of Chicago economics. China's rural industries are not, for the most part, privately owned. While they enjoy great operational autonomy, they are owned and regulated by local authorities and labour collectives. In the Russia of today surveys suggest that most employees do feel that they should have a stake in their enterprises and will not accept a transfer of control from Moscow to a foreign investor or local mafioso—this latter being the probable end result of privatization.

It might be objected that China's economic success is indissolubly linked to the type of ugly repression seen in Beijing and elsewhere in 1989. But this is not so. The advance of the new collective sector was itself the product of the relative liberalization of the pre-1989 period. It is concentrated in Southern China, far from the control of the Beijing ministries. It furnishes better jobs than those available either in the large centrally controlled factories or in agriculture. This means both that it does not require military-style policing and that it encourages upgrading and mechanization elsewhere in the economy.<sup>2</sup>

Russia's still insecure democratic revolution will surely be undermined

<sup>1</sup> For information on China's economic performance, see *The Economist*, vol. 319, no. 7709, 1 June 1991, pp. 17–20. For an outstanding and incisive analysis of the emergence of China's rural industries, see Philip Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangtze Delta*, Stanford 1990.

<sup>2</sup> The advance of China's economy is a broad-based phenomenon—the rural industries employ about one hundred million workers while China's export surplus on its trade with the United States, at \$10 billion, is second only to that of Japan. While certain aspects of China's domestic political and social regime are deeply deplorable, they do not explain the lift-off of this gigantic economy. Indeed the statutes established by the Beijing government also menace rural industrial development, by rendering it vulnerable to overtaxing by a greedy bureaucracy. Amnesty International has recently published a report on the arbitrary and unacceptable practice of administrative detention (see *Prisoners Without Crime*, London 1991), the motive here seems to be political control. For a discussion of both good and bad features of China's development, see Jean Dreze and A.K. Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, Oxford 1989.

by continuing economic failure. And it would be vain to hope for a harmonious post-Soviet 'Union of Sovereign States' unless it has a viable economic basis. What the peoples of the former Soviet Union are looking for is real results, not new doctrinaire experiments. They would like to see economic structures that release initiative and give them the resources and independence they need to tackle their own problems. They would be foolish to allow false friends in the West to cut them off from potential allies, and relevant experience, in the East. And people on the Left would be well advised to press for economic solutions that promise real results, since these are also going to favour the conditions, freedoms and possibilities of the mass of ordinary working people. A rouble-yuan trading bloc could stave off the spectre of massive unemployment and could facilitate the exchange of Russian raw materials and heavy equipment for Chinese light-industrial goods.

The coup has removed the one really serious objection to what is advocated here—namely, the fear that Sino-Soviet economic cooperation might lead to a Soviet Tiananmen Square. The defeat of the coup has surely laid to rest any risk of a carbon copy of the tragic events in China. But, despite the fact that the new Russian government of Boris Yeltsin owes its legitimacy to genuine elections, there remains an authoritarian danger to Russia and the other former Soviet republics. The old Communist apparatus has been routed but the new ruling powers inherit both personnel and habits from the old order. The Russian president rules by decree and has subtracted many powers from elected assemblies at local and regional levels. These presidential 'ukases' promise a dramatic recentralization of Russian life, with officials appointed by the centre in each region to act as 'the eyes and ears of the Tsar' as Yeltsin put it in a speech on 2 September. The form of words was doubtless a joke, but a worrying one nonetheless. Other decrees have suspended not only the Communist Party but also newspapers aligned with it; trade unions and labour collectives henceforth are to be made subordinate to enterprise managers, and enterprise managers, so some reports allege, made responsible to the new 'Union centre of the unified economic space'. And finally, some of Yeltsin's pronouncements have aroused fears that the new Union will be run with a heavy Russian hand; not only is this tactless and undesirable but it also ignores the fact that several of the non-Russian republics (for example Kazakhstan) have made greater progress with economic reforms than Russia.

It is, of course, still very early days. But if the leaders of Russia and the new Union of Sovereign States wish to get their economy moving then the Chinese experience suggests that they should not go down the path of renewed centralization. They should instead foster local initiative and encourage autonomous labour collectives. It would be a sad irony if the Soviet Union's struggle for democracy produced in two or three years time a civil society that was markedly less vital and independent than that which will be bequeathed by the Stalinist gerontocrats in Beijing when death gathers them to the last Politburo in the sky.

## A Usable Past?

In a well-known passage in *What is History?*, E.H. Carr addresses the perennially perplexing issue of historical inevitability. Seeking to ridicule the "‘might-have-been’ school of thought—or rather of emotion", Carr contrasts the treatment of more chronologically distant events from the more recent. "The historian," he tells us, 'writes of the Norman Conquest or the American War of Independence as if what happened was in fact bound to happen, and as if it was his business simply to explain what happened and why... When, however, I write about the Russian revolution of 1917 in precisely this way—the only proper way to the historian—I find myself under attack from my critics for having by implication depicted what happened as something that was bound to happen, and failed to examine all the other things that might have happened.'

Carr was well aware of why his treatment of the Russian Revolution as a 'closed chapter' provoked such a response. As he put it, 'plenty of people, who have suffered directly or vicariously from the results of the Bolshevik victory, or still fear its remoter consequences, desire to register their protest against it.' They thus let 'their imagination run riot on all the more agreeable things that might have happened.' Writing in the early 1960s, Carr undoubtedly had in mind the then dominant Cold War historiography which favoured almost any outcome other than a Bolshevik victory and still reflected the hope of its reversal. But his complaint would apply equally to other versions of Soviet history. Thus, a decade later, he could be quite critical of Stephen Cohen's biography of Bukharin, on the grounds that its attempt to rescue the kinder and gentler version of socialist construction articulated by one of Stalin's chief victims was excessively imaginative.

Samuel Farber's *Before Stalinism*<sup>1</sup> will probably evoke a similar or perhaps even more dismissive response from professional historians. It is not so much a work of history as 'a political reflection on history, an inquiry into what alternatives existed and *might* have worked at the time, as well as what can we learn for today.' Thus, while acknowledging that the past is immutable—Carr's 'closed chapter'—Farber insists that it is usable. To ponder what might have been, he would argue, is not to rewrite history, and still less the past, but it can be a powerful means of rethinking the present.

Vladimir Brovkin's *The Mensheviks After October*<sup>2</sup> is a much more

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Farber, *Before Stalinism. The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, £35.00 hbk.

conventionally historical inquiry into the tribulations of the party that Trotsky, in the midst of the October Revolution, notoriously consigned to the 'rubbish heap of history'. A revised Princeton Ph.D. dissertation, the book reconstructs the Mensheviks' disarray in the immediate aftermath of the Bolsheviks' seizure of power, their 'political comeback' in the spring of 1918, and their (divided) response to the rigging of local soviet elections and the onset of full-scale civil war up to October 1918.

Thoroughly researched, and densely empirical, the book scrupulously avoids the kind of counter-factualism in which Farber indulges. Its thesis is elegant in its simplicity. It is that the Mensheviks were Abel to the Bolsheviks' Cain (see the Biblical epigraph), a Doppelgänger of the democratic socialist aspirations for which the Bolsheviks claimed—and may have believed—they stood. They thus were 'dangerous because they belied the Bolsheviks' image of themselves. It was hard for the Bolsheviks to admit that the party of the proletarian revolution, the party of Red October, was losing support. It was much easier to destroy the evidence.' (p. 295—I have reworked the order of the sentences.) As the uninvited guests at the post-October feast, they were a constant reminder of the Bolsheviks' betrayal of soviet democracy, and paid dearly for their insistence on staying around. Nor were they the only ones. Brovkin convincingly demonstrates how the Bolsheviks employed 'Menshevik (or Socialist-Revolutionary) agitation' as an excuse for the disintegration of their support among workers and a means of legitimizing repression against both their political opponents and workers themselves.

Of the two books, Farber's is the one that aims to extend the quarrel that the Western Left has had with Soviet Communism ever since Rosa Luxemburg crossed swords with Lenin. Luxemburg, it will be recalled, protested against both the Soviet government's Land Decree, which legalized the parcellization of landlords' estates among the peasantry, and the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. (The Mensheviks, who had even less sympathy for peasant aspirations and had received a meagre 3 per cent of the votes in the elections to the Constituent Assembly—a figure unmentioned by Brovkin—protested as well, though on quite different grounds.) She thus prefigured two subsequently disparate lines of critique, one associated with the militant Left and the other reflecting a more moderate or reformist position. The former focused on what was perceived as the Communist Party's betrayal of proletarian democracy and revolutionary internationalism. It would encompass council-communist and syndicalist indictments, Trotskyist analyses of bureaucratic degeneration, and Maoist- or Third World-inspired revolutionism. The latter was from the anti-authoritarian or democratic socialist standpoint, historically rooted in social democracy and, latterly, Eurocommunism.

Focusing on the years 1917 to 1923, Farber centres his study around the problematic relationship between revolution and democracy. This

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<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Brovkin, *The Mensheviks After October. Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1987, £9.95/\$14.95 pbk; £26.75/\$39.96 hbk.

is reminiscent of Carmen Sirianni's *Workers Control and Socialist Democracy* (1982). Indeed, the two books have much in common, including their authors' dependence on the abundant English-language historiography of the Russian Revolution—neither reads Russian. Both are relentless in their criticism of what Farber calls 'mainstream Bolshevism', by which he means Lenin. But whereas Sirianni situated the struggle for democracy in the factory committees and, to a lesser extent, the soviets, Farber's book is both more broadly and more narrowly conceived. It includes not only the issue of soviet and trade-union autonomy, but freedom of the press, the exercise of state repression, and socialist legality. Much of it is organized around such questions as 'Was "War Communism" Justified?'; 'Was Repression Practical?'; 'What is "Class Justice?"'; and are there 'Inalienable Rights under Socialism?' The answers, informed by a good deal of hindsight and mainstream Anglo-American jurisprudential theory, are: no, no, affirmative action, and yes.

What, then, distinguishes Farber's thought experiment from a civil-libertarian diatribe, or Brovkin's thinly disguised pro-Menshevik account? It is not merely rhetorical gestures toward 'both greater democracy *and* a more militant, if not revolutionary orientation', nor the citation of Victor Serge and Ante Ciliga as formative influences. It is, on the one hand, Farber's recognition of the necessity for extending popular sovereignty beyond the political realm to include material and cultural relations, and on the other, his acknowledgement of the need for—even approval of—temporary political dictatorship by a revolutionary minority. The Lenin he indicts is not a proto-Stalinist, but a quasi-Jacobin. Instead of theorizing and institutionalizing 'the transformation and democratization of the daily life of the working class on the shopfloor and in the community', Lenin institutionalized the dictatorship of the state.

Throughout the book but especially in its penultimate chapter, Farber is at pains to find alternatives. On virtually every issue he locates them *within* the orbit of Bolshevism, both to the right and left of the 'mainstream'. It is in this sense that his analysis is more narrowly conceived than Sirianni's, which reached outside of Bolshevism to Gramsci, Pannekoek and the experiences of workers' councils in half a dozen countries. Farber's (preferable) alternatives include Riazanov and Lozovsky, the only Bolshevik members of the Central Executive Committee to vote against the Constituent Assembly's dissolution; Kamenev, who 'attempted to implement measures restricting the arbitrary powers of the Cheka'; the 'Tribunalists' (a term of his own invention) who tried to do the same; and, yes, of course, the Left Bolshevik opponents of one-man management, the Democratic Centralists, Workers' Oppositionists, the fascinating Miasnikov, partisan of unrestricted freedom of the press, and even (!) Trotsky in his 'New Course' proposals of December 1923.

It is useful to be reminded of the internal fragmentation among the Bolsheviks, something that Brovkin, perhaps inevitably, plays down. Farber casts these dissenting voices in the role of Cassandra, with Stalinism as the consequence of the party failing to heed their warnings or suppressing their activities. That their opposition to the

'mainstream' was often tactical rather than principled, that they were loath to go outside the party to appeal to broader constituencies, and never saw the need for 'an intra-Bolshevik tactical bloc for "democratic survival"', is of no consequence. For Farber they provide evidence that 'alternatives existed and *might* have worked at the time'.

Possibly, but I seriously wonder whether anything would have 'worked' (in the sense of democratization) given what Lars Lih has called the 'double breakdown' of economic relations and political authority that began in 1914 and which made possible the 1917 Revolution.<sup>3</sup> The revolution—any social revolution worthy of the name—was a tremendously liberating experience, opening up seemingly infinite possibilities for remaking social existence.<sup>4</sup> This, incidentally, is why it has refused to become a 'closed chapter'. But at the same time, the revolution accelerated the double breakdown. The already overstrained rail system ground to a halt; factories, depleted of stocks and deprived of fuel, shut down; peasants, having occupied landlords' property, turned their backs on the cities and hunkered down in their village communes; and regional revolts resulted in the creation of dozens of pigmy and larger sized republics. The term 'civil war' is hardly adequate to these circumstances, which in many respects resembled the Time of Troubles of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

To be sure, the Leninist and even Marxist neglect of the need for an independent civil society (for that is indeed what Farber asserts was possible or at least desirable after 1917) was a major impediment to its realization. But it is harder to argue that this was the cause of civil society's collapse in the years 1914–21. As Lih notes, '[p]erhaps we would have a greater empathy with the strivings of those troubled times if we read less Marx and more Hobbes.'

In this sense, I find Farber's standards wholly inappropriate and the social-democratic alternative offered by Brovkin's badly divided Mensheviks inadequate to the task. Mainstream Western (and particularly American) political theory is very uncomfortable with the concept of statehood, but the survival of Russia as a unified state was surely what was at stake, as much in 1914 as 1917 or 1921. Would Russia survive as a state—any kind of a state—without intervention from, and subordination to, outside forces? Would such an alternative fate have been preferable to Leninist authoritarian state-building? Rather than Farber's utopian reconstruction of the Russian Revolution, it is these questions that a new Soviet Left must grapple with in its search for a usable past.

<sup>3</sup> Lars Lih, 'Breakdown and Reconstitution: Thinking About the Russian Revolution', *Problems of Communism*, vol. xxxix, no. 2, March–April 1990, pp. 98–104. 'If one conclusion emerges unambiguously from the study of 1917, it is that democracy—either liberal or socialist—was inadequate for coping with the double breakdown ... In fact, the luckiest thing that ever happened to the Constituent Assembly—the symbol of Western-style democracy in Russia—was its dispersal by the Bolsheviks.'

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams, Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*, Oxford 1989.